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SEPTEMBER



MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MURDER-GO-ROUND

A NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

By BRETT HALLIDAY

NORMAN DANIELS
EDWARD D. HOCH
BILL PRONZINI
HENRY SLESAR
MARTHA HOKE



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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER, 1969
VOL. 25, NO. 4

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL MURDER-GO-ROUND

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Death was his trade and he knew it well the gun-for-hire monster Mike Shayne must find and destroy this black night—for one of them must surely die before the morning came!

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The
New
MIKE
SHAYNE
Short
Novel

MURDER-GO-ROUND

all



*Murder was his business, and he lived — and
was all too ready to die — by a gun, this
phantom Mike Shayne trailed in the night.
Before the dawn came one of them must die.*

by BRETT HALLIDAY

THE TALL, SLENDER man stepped from a black Cadillac in the driveway of a large mansion in one of the most exclusive sections of Miami. He looked once at his wristwatch, then strode from the mansion.

The noon sun was hot and bright.

The man whistled a tune, reached his right hand for the doorknob of the side door and stopped. A white envelope was taped to the door. He

reached for the envelope, a puzzled expression on his handsome, tanned face.

Sudden, loud, a single shot exploded in the sun.

A bullet tore through the door at a sharp downward angle not three inches from the tall man's hand.

The man recoiled, cried out in reflex fear, staggered and fell to the gravel.

On his belly, oblivious to the

damage to his expensive gray suit, the man crawled frantically for the cover of the car port.

He lay shivering, his head down. Nothing moved in the sunny day. Some birds flew chattering past as if laughing at the man who lay on his belly.

He raised his head, looked around. Some three hundred yards away across the quiet and shaded street there was a large grove of tall trees. The man looked at his splintered door and then at the trees again. There was nowhere else the shot could have come from.

He watched the trees carefully for some five minutes. He saw nothing. Slowly, carefully, he got up and ran to the door. He opened it and jumped inside. Only then did he stop.

He stood inside the door, breathing hard, and his eyes fell on the white envelope again. He stared at it for a full minute. Then he reached, took it from his door, closed the door, and opened the envelope.

John Calhoun, Esq.

You have just been murdered. You were shot once by a rifle. Your body lies in the sun in front of your own door. It could lie anywhere, anytime. Think about it.

John Calhoun held the letter and stared at it in disbelief, his face chalk white.

Two days later, John Calhoun stepped from the steam room of his downtown Athletic Club in the

heart of Miami. The color had returned to his face under his tan by now. He took a shower, then plunged into the club pool for his daily swim. Ten laps, up and back.

He showered again, slipped into a sweat suit, picked up a thick briefcase, and went out into the sun of the club sun roof. He walked along, nodding to acquaintances, until he reached the last deck chair on the sunny side of the deck.

Before he sat down to work, he walked to the parapet of the five-story building and looked out over Miami. The great city glistened in the bright afternoon sun. Tall buildings towered here and there nearby, and the only clear view was on the north side of his building.

Calhoun returned to his deck chair — and froze.

A white envelope was pinned to the chair.

Calhoun stood paralyzed, unable to move, sweat pouring from his face, his muscles trying to make him leap away, run, do anything.

Something seemed to brush his shoulder — an angry, screaming hiss, thud, whine of the ricochet.

Everyone on the sun deck began to shout, jump up, stare around. Panic ran through all the lounging men like a brush fire in dry mountains.

Only John Calhoun didn't move. He was staring at the white envelope and the neat bullet hole not an inch below it in the canvas of the deck chair where his head

would have been in less than ten seconds!

Amid the pandemonium, John Calhoun remained immobile. Then he slowly reached for the envelope and opened it. His fingers had begun to tremble. With his hands shaking he read the note:

John Calhoun, Esq.

For the second time you are now dead. Shot exactly one inch below the letter you are reading through my generosity. There is no escape from your murder, except along one path. Three times, as they say, is out. Dig a hole, you will not be safe. Think harder.

II

MICHAEL SHAYNE leaned back in his desk chair in his private office and considered where he would eat lunch. Somewhere cool, with cool drinks and a peaceful atmosphere. It was far too hot to go out again to work.

He had made up his mind and had decided to take Lucy Hamilton with him, when the secretary herself beat his hand in its reach for his intercom buzzer. The intercom buzzed.

"Yes, Angel?" Shayne said. "I hope it's not important. I've decided to take a charming girl, by name Lucy Hamilton, to an expensive lunch."

His bantering tone was lost in Lucy's cool voice. "A Mr. Calhoun to see you, Michael. John Calhoun."

Lucy's tone implied that the man who wanted to see him wasn't just any John Calhoun, but *the* John Calhoun.

"The lawyer?" Shayne asked.

"That's right, Michael," Lucy said. "He says it's urgent."

"It always is, Angel," Shayne said. "Okay, Trot him in."

In the seconds before the door opened and John Calhoun came in, Shayne ran the man's profile through his mind: forty-five; once a pretty fair athlete — middle-distance running — in college; one of the best criminal lawyers in Miami, or anywhere else; rich and successful and senior partner in the law firm of Naidman, Calhoun, Groot and Vega.

"Mr. Shayne?" Calhoun said. "Can I count completely on your discretion?"

Shayne said, "Sit down, Mr. Calhoun. You know the law better than I do. I can't promise discretion until I know what I'm supposed to be discreet about."

The tall, slender man sat down and ran a hand through his graying hair. His tanned face was drawn. He nodded. "Very well, Mr. Shayne. You'll forgive me if I'm somewhat less than my normal self. The ice-water that is supposed to replace blood in my legal veins is missing these days."

"That sounds serious, counselor. You're the best and coolest criminal lawyer around, right?"

"The best, yes," Calhoun said. It

wasn't boasting, it was a simple statement of fact. "Far from the coolest just now."

"Tell me the details."

Calhoun told the detective. Shayne listened with his gray eyes growing cloudier and cloudier as the tall lawyer went step by step over the macabre sniping.

"Both times the note was there first — proving that the sniper could do exactly as he said he could," Shayne said.

"No doubt of it, Mr. Shayne," Calhoun said. "The sniper is quite correct. I have been murdered twice. I'm dead, if he had wanted me dead."

"So he wants something else," Shayne said. "Extortion. What does he want, counselor?"

"That is what I don't know."

Shayne cocked a surprised eyebrow. "You haven't been contacted for the pay-off, whatever it is?"

"Not yet, that's why I'm here. The sniper hasn't made his move. I seem to have some time. I want you to find out who and what is behind it."

"You can't guess what's behind it?"

"Not the faintest idea, Mr. Shayne. And I'm scared. Not worried, scared," Calhoun said. "This sniper can murder me — at any time, in any place."

The tall lawyer's hands shook as he spoke, and his tanned face lost a lot of its color. Shayne watched Calhoun. The lawyer was being



real. About the toughest, coolest lawyer in the city, Calhoun was terrified.

"No," Shayne said, "He wants you to think he can hit you anytime, any place. He can't. You live a routine life, right? He's checked your routine. Change it, that's step one."

"And step two?"

"Stay out of sight," Shayne said. "Step three is to go to the police. What can I do? A bodyguard won't help you."

Calhoun stood up, abruptly. The tall lawyer began to pace the quiet, sunny office. He stopped with his back to Shayne, staring out the window at the sunny city.

"I can only change my routine to a certain extent. My life is largely determined by my work, and I can't change that. I've already decided not to go home until this is over. I don't want my wife endangered. I'll stay at my club. I

can't stay out of sight. You know as well as I do, Mr. Shayne, that this sniper has demonstrated that no matter what I do, sooner or later he can kill me."

"The police?" Shayne said.

"No, I don't want the police yet."

"That isn't bright, Calhoun."

"Can they save me completely? Absolute safety?"

"No one can."

"Then I don't want them. They would be obvious. Easily circumvented. No, I want the sniper to think I'm too scared of him to do anything."

"And what do you want me to do?"

"I told you. The only thing that can be done — find out who is behind it, and stop him."

Shayne studied the stiff back of the famous lawyer. It was a strong back, but it was scared now — exposed, vulnerable. A back that said without words that Calhoun knew what he was asking.

"There's not much for me to go on, counselor," Shayne said. "Unless you can give me some leads, what can I do?"

"I don't know," Calhoun said, turned toward Shayne. "The only leads I could give you is the three cases I'm working on directly now, none of which seems worth much as a motive, plus perhaps, six hundred past cases where someone might have a reason to hate me."

"No past cases," Shayne said.

"This isn't hate. Revenge — a man kills you. He doesn't warn you."

"To make me sweat, shiver, run scared?" Calhoun said.

"No, he strikes and runs. He doesn't need anything more than you dead," Shayne said. "How about your present cases?"

"How could they figure? I'm a top lawyer. Why would anyone want me off a case I'm handling? I'm a defense attorney, not a prosecutor, damn it. Besides, any of my partners would handle the cases as well as I could."

"Personal enemies then?"

Calhoun frowned. "I've racked my brain. Over the years I must have made a lot of enemies, but I can only come up with two capable of this kind of torture."

Shayne rubbed his gaunt jaw. "It's not likely. Enemies would kill quietly. Why draw attention to themselves? No, it's some kind of extortion. It has to be. I can't do a damn thing unless I have an idea what they want."

Calhoun picked up his hat. "Then it's hopeless. I'm sorry I wasted your time."

Calhoun started for the door. Shayne stopped him.

"Okay, I'll see what I can do. Give me those two names."

III

MIKE SHAYNE found the first name on Calhoun's list of two enemies at an address in a small town

twenty miles north of Miami. He parked and looked at the house he had come to. It was a nursing home. Inside he asked for Joe Gross. The woman at the desk, a pinch-faced, scrawny thing as starched as her white uniform, barely looked at the detective.

"Relative?"

"No."

"Then what do you want? Our patients aren't allowed more than two visitors a week. Nothing but trouble."

"Sorry. Didn't know this was a prison."

She looked up furiously and met Shayne's hard gray eyes. He recognized her type — a two-bit receptionist dressed to the nines like a nurse she didn't have the brains to be.

Shayne just stared at her.

"It's important," Shayne said, and flashed his old special police shield. "I won't get in the way, nurse."

The combination of the hint of official police, plus the word nurse, did the trick. Like most of her breed she was a coward in front of authority, and the nurse flattered her.

"Well, all right. Not that Joe Gross can help you. Room 12."

No one seemed to care how he got to room 12. The halls were dirty, and stank of stale food and worse. One of the thousands of hole-in-the-wall homes where the old were filed away to die, and the

only interest anyone had in them was their last few dollars.

He pushed open the door of room 12 when there was no answer to his knock. At first he thought the room was empty. It was dim, the shades drawn. Then he made out a shape in a corner, and a pair of sharp eyes watching him.

"Mr. Gross?" Shayne asked.

"I didn't say come in. When a man's old, he has no rights, that's it."

"I had to talk to you."

The sharp eyes glinted. "That's something new, anyway. Here, no one has to talk to anyone. Why do we hang on, you know? Day in and day out — zero. What do you want, mister?"

The eyes moved, and Shayne saw a small, old man in a wheelchair wheel out into the open. A man not so terribly old, but looking much older than his years. A sick man.

"I came to talk about John Calhoun," Shayne said.

The man in the wheelchair just looked at Shayne. No reaction, violent or otherwise. "Then you know I've got nothing much to say about Calhoun."

"Have you been in Miami the last few days, Mr. Gross?"

"I haven't been out of this place in the last few years, Mr. — What did you say your name was?"

"Shayne. Mike Shayne. You don't like Calhoun?"

Gross didn't bat an eye. "John

was my friend. Then he cost me my wife, and my life. I said I'd kill him. I'd laugh when he died, but I don't care about killing him now."

"What did he do to you?"

"I told you. My wife fell in love with him. He used her. She killed herself. I died then. Later, because I didn't care, I had an accident. You see what's left."

"Someone's trying to kill him, Mr. Gross. I'll find out if you left here."

"Find out then. Did John send you? Yes, I suppose he did. He doesn't know about my accident. No, I didn't try to kill John. But I'd cheer if someone did."

"You have any candidates for cheers?"

Gross laughed. "Don't you trust Calhoun to tell you all? That's smart. I wouldn't trust him to tell anything. Candidates? Well, there's Cassius Salk. I'd look him up."

"Salk he mentioned. You and Salk, no one else."

"Aside from his cases, and there ought to be some good haters among them, I guess Salk and I are the only two. Unless—"

Shayne rubbed his jaw. "Unless?"

"Unless Celia's first husband is still around."

"Celia?"

"Mrs. Calhoun, Shayne. John really hasn't told you much. Celia was married before. Her son isn't John's. The two girls are, but not the boy. John stole her, too; only

Celia he married. I heard that her ex-husband was bitter, very bitter."

"When did this happen?"

"Fifteen years ago. The boy should be in he last year or so of high school."

"Do you know this ex-husband's name?"

"No, I never did."

Shayne nodded. "Thanks, Mr. Gross."

"Thank you. It's made my year. A visitor, and knowing that someone is trying to kill Calhoun. I'll sleep well tonight. One thing, Mr. Shayne."

"What's that?"

"Don't try too hard to save Calhoun."

Shayne had nothing to say. He left the crippled old man smiling.

Cassius Salk had been John Calhoun's first partner. That was seventeen years ago. Salk had been caught bribing a juror. He had gone to prison. No suspicion had fallen on Calhoun.

"But Cassius never forgave me," Calhoun had explained. "I had nothing to do with what Cassius did, but I could have perjured myself and maybe gotten him off. I didn't. I never could flout the law that way. The law is my god."

"You let him go to prison?" Shayne had said.

"Yes. I told him he deserved what he got. I was a smug young fool then. I was outraged at Cassius for demeaning the law. I would

not be so righteous now, but I would still do the same."

After that Salk had tried several times to hurt Calhoun — after Salk left prison. Then Salk had faded away — disbarred, of course. Calhoun had not heard of him in years.

It took Shayne two days to track Salk down. Two wasted days.

He found Cassius Salk in a small town in Georgia, in a grave marked by nothing but a small metal plaque. He had been dead for two years.

IV

WHEN SHAYNE returned to Miami he called John Calhoun.

"No, Mr. Shayne, there has been no contact from an extortionist, and no more sniping. I am living at my club; I go out as little as possible. When I do go out I'm careful, but we both know it's all useless unless you find the sniper."

"Until he contacts you I've nothing to go on," Shayne said. "But I'll keep trying."

"That's all I can ask, isn't it?" Calhoun said.

Shayne rubbed at his gaunt jaw when he hung up. It wasn't right. The sniping had to be some kind of extortion, and yet no contact had been made yet. Unless it wasn't extortion, but some psycho out to make Calhoun sweat before killing him.

If that were true, there might not be much time.

Shayne went to Miami Police Headquarters. Chief Gentry was out of town, so Shayne went to Lieutenant George Bellows.

"Let me take a look at your M.O. files," Shayne said.

"Something up, Mike?" Bellows wanted to know.

"I don't know," Shayne said, and said nothing more yet.

"What M.O. you interested in?" "Extortion."

Bellows was thoughtful. "That doesn't sound good, Mike. Hard to handle alone."

"I know how hard it is if it comes to extortion. I'm not sure yet what I've got."

"Okay, I'll get the file," Bellows said.

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. His whole judgment told him to bring the police in. But he had given his word, and Calhoun was right that all the police in the world couldn't stop the sniper if he really wanted to kill Calhoun. Only catching the sniper before he could shoot again would do that — and one man had as good a chance of doing that as all the cops. Maybe better, because one man didn't make himself so obvious.

Bellows was a good cop. The lieutenant brought the M.O. file on all known extortionists who had ever worked Miami, and then left Shayne alone to work. Bellows would wait for Shayne to tell.

The redhead studied the M.O. file. It was thick, filed by name,

cross-filed under method headings. Shayne studied the *Extortion, physical threat* heading.

It was slow work, but after two hours he had narrowed it down to five men who had used the threat of sniping or ambush, and then three who added the gimmick of warning their victim after the sniping miss that he was as good as dead the next time.

None of the M.O.'s matched exactly, but the three were pretty close. Shayne checked the rest of the history of each man. They were all hardened types and repeaters; all had served some time. None had operated the sniping-extortion for at least four years. Four years is a long time in a criminal's life.

Shayne went back to Bellows.

"Tell me about Mace Jones, Andy Gradell, and Moe George."

Bellows leaned back, thought. "Moe George is serving ten-to-twenty in Atlanta on his last extortion. He shot a guy. Mace Jones hasn't been in Miami for a long time as far as I know. Last I heard he was working in Seattle."

"Maybe he came back. Does he work on his own?"

"Mostly, but he's been known to take a contract job," Bellows said. "Gradell is your contract man. He's not strictly an extortionist. He's a syndicate hired hand they use for special jobs that take perfect shooting. He's one of the best shots I ever heard of — was a sniper in the Army in Korea."

"Syndicate? The Miami family?"

"No, a sort of floater. Officially he works out of the Cleveland family, but he moves around. He's an expert, Mike, and you know that means he can work where he pleases. He'll work for anyone who pays his price, as long as it's in the brotherhood, or has their okay."

"Anything extra-special about Jones or Gradell?"

"Jones, no," Bellows said, "but Gradell has a quirk we know but can't use, not so far. He's got a special set of rifles, custom-made in Germany. We never laid eyes on them, and no other cop has, but we know their mark. They're all chambered for the 10.75 Mauser cartridge."

"That's a big slug," Shayne said.

"Big and accurate as hell in Gradell's hands."

Shayne rubbed at his jaw. "Any hint Gradell's in town?"

"No."

"Can I have a pic of Gradell and Mace Jones?"

"I'll get them made," Bellows said.

Shayne left the lieutenant watching nothing in particular, but thinking that from the sound of what Shayne wanted to know, the redhead should tell him what was going on.

Shayne thought about the same, and every time he called in to Lucy he expected to hear that the sniper had made his third try and Calhoun was dead.

But Lucy Hamilton had nothing to report, and Shayne went on working against time in the only way he could — looking for one small break, anything, that would give him a lead to who the sniper was and why he was squeezing Calhoun.

He went first after leaving Bellows at the athletic club, climbed to the roof, and located the deck chair with the hole in it. He studied the hole, and the deep mark in the wall behind it. A low mark. The bullet had come at a downward angle. He traced it back with his eye.

There was only one building it could have come from — across the street and slightly to the left. A good, long shot — over three hundred yards. Long, but simple enough for an expert marksman with plenty of time and his distance estimated accurately, and the target a stationary white envelope.

He could not be exactly sure of the floor in the building, but it had to be one of three. His eye-estimate was not perfect enough to pinpoint it. But it had to be one of the three.

V

MIKE SHAYNE tried all three rooms in the building across the street. He knew he was right that it was one of the three. They were all men's rooms! With locks on the doors, and the windows giving a clear shot.

That was all he was right about. He found nothing in any of the three rooms, except a scratched windowsill on the top room. It looked like something had been rested against the sill, but that didn't help him.

What he had to have was some break, some small error, some tiny but definite indication of who and of where he could find the man.

He did not find anything in the three men's rooms.

He went back down to his car and drove out to John Calhoun's house in the expensive suburb. He parked and studied the side door of the house from his seat.

A curtain fluttered at the window of the front room.

Shayne watched the curtain for a second, and then turned to look at the grove of trees Calhoun had mentioned. The lawyer was right; the first shot at him could only have come from those trees. Someone up in one of the trees to give the right angle — a trained military sniper like Gradell.

He left his car and walked across in the sun to the grove. He kept checking back over his shoulder to be sure of the line of fire. Then, when he had the line, he searched through the trees looking for one that showed any marks of having been climbed.

The fourth tree in, a very tall pine, had the marks — very definite marks of professionalism. The tree had been climbed by someone using

the spikes and belt of a lumberjack or lineman. Someone who climbed and could hang in the tree without using his hands after he was set where he wanted to be.

Shayne looked up and found a large cross limb at just about the right height. The spike marks went up to it, and not, as far as he could tell from the ground, beyond the limb. He was trying to decide if it was worth climbing up, and if he could climb up without equipment, when his gray eyes spotted something in the underbrush.

A small cardboard box.

A cartridge box!

Shayne picked it up. It was heavy. He opened it. It was an almost full box of imported 10.75 Mauser ammunition!

Gradell.

His gray eyes narrowed into steel points. If it was Gradell that could mean Mafia, and that could mean that Calhoun was lying all the way. Or maybe not Mafia — Lieutenant Bellows had said that Gradell worked outside if the brotherhood said okay.

If it was Gradell. One box of 10.75 Mauser ammunition didn't prove Gradell. Shayne considered the box. Almost full. He thought for some time, and it might be the break. If Gradell had lost a full box, or whoever the sniper was, then maybe he had needed more in a hurry.

Shayne went back to his car and



drove into Miami to his office. Lucy shook her head as he came in.

"Nothing from Mr. Calhoun, Michael," the brown-eyed girl said.

"Anything else?"

"Lieutenant Bellows sent over some pictures."

"Thanks, Angel. Get me a list of all ammunition dealers in town who carry 10.75 Mauser shells."

In his private office, Shayne looked at the pictures. Both Andy Gradell and Mace Jones were distinctive types. The pictures were some seven years old, minimum, thirties, and a man doesn't change much between thirty-five and fifty.

He had some lunch sent up while he waited for Lucy to compile the list of ammunition sellers. There

were a lot of places in Miami that sold ammunition, but only nine places Lucy had made sure carried 10.75 Mauser ammo.

Shayne sighed. It looked like a long afternoon, but there was no other way to see if he was in luck.

He finished his lunch, slowly, clapped on his panama, and walked out with Lucy's brown eyes looking sympathetic. He got his car and began the slow rounds of the listed stores. It took most of the afternoon. After six stores that drew blanks, he began to think that he was not going to have any luck, unless this was a case of starting the wrong end.

It was.

The eighth store was pay dirt. The manager of the small, out-of-the-way gun shop nodded to Shayne's question about selling 10.75 Mauser ammo recently.

"Maybe six days ago, maybe five," the manager said. "We're a specialty gun shop, you know? Custom guns, foreign ammo, most of our customers are referred to us. I haven't sold five boxes of 10.75 this year."

"You knew this customer?"

"No, never saw him before."

Shayne showed the manager his pictures. The manager studied them, taking them into the sunlight at the front window. He looked at them closely and carefully.

"This is the man."

It was Gradell.

"You're sure?" Shayne asked.

"Pretty sure. He looks a little different, a lot less hair and grayer, but I'm pretty sure."

"How did he pay?"

"Cash."

"And took the shells with him?"

"Yes."

Some break. Shayne swore inside. He knew now it was probably Gradell. But who had hired Gradell and why?

"Did he leave anything to give you an idea of where he can be found?"

"No, I — wait a moment."

The manager hurried away into a back room. He came back with a ball-point pen, cheap, stamped with the name of a store: *Alice's Boutique*.

"He dropped this, I'm pretty sure," the manager said. "It's not worth much, but I kept it in my lost-and-found drawer just in case he came back for it."

Shayne took the pen, looked at it. "Thanks."

It was new and hardly used. He wrote down the address, and gave the pen back to the manager. It was on little chances like this that detective work was built.

Gradell maybe hadn't even missed the pen.

VI

ALICE'S BOUTIQUE turned out to be a large, expensive store in the heart of Miami Beach. The clientele going in and out looked like most of them could have

bought the store — the women all smiles and determination, the men not unhappy but bored. It wasn't enough that the wives had to spend the money; they had to make the men be there when it was spent.

A woman who looked like she had been constructed of painted plastic to a perfect mold, approached Shayne as if she was sure he had gotten into the wrong store.

"Yes?" eyebrow arched very high.

"I'm looking for a man," Shayne said, and showed the pic of Gradell.

She looked at it. "I've never seen him. Sorry."

"Look carefully," Shayne said, "this is a police matter. Maybe he just came in once, but it would have been recently."

"Police?" she said, and looked again. "No, I know I've never seen that man."

"How about the rest of the staff?"

She nodded. "P e r h a p s Mr. Granger."

Mr. Granger turned out to be a muscular gentleman who wore his clothes like a duke. Only under the clothes Shayne recognized the combination of store cop and bouncer. The place probably got a fair share of unwanted visitors who weren't looking for men.

Shayne showed Granger the picture.

"No," Granger said, looking carefully, "I never saw him. And I think I'd of remembered, you

know. He looks like a type we don't get much here. Crook?"

"Yeah," Shayne said. "In spades."

Granger nodded. "I'd have spotted him, for sure. Like I spotted you. Shamus?"

"Shayne."

"Mike Shayne? Sure, I should of recognized you. I'm telling it straight, I never spotted this guy."

"Thanks," Shayne said.

He went back out. He trusted Granger's eye. Which meant that Gradell had come by the pen some other way. A dead end so far, but you never knew. It was something.

He sat in his car and thought. He knew it was Gradell. A man of Gradell's fame and connections would not go unnoticed in Miami, not by those in the same world. The next step looked like putting his informers to work.

He drove back across the causeway to his office. Lucy Hamilton had no messages. He went through the cloak and dagger routine with Little Max and Whispers. He told them he wanted anything on Andy Gradell. They weren't happy, but they agreed to keep a cautious ear open.

Shayne sat back and wondered what to do next. Lucy solved the problem. She buzzed him.

"A Mrs. Calhoun on the line, Michael."

"Switch her on, Angel," Shayne said.

She had a quiet voice, soft and

low. "Mr. Shayne? I must talk to you."

"What about, Mrs. Calhoun?"

"About John, of course. Please, it's very important. Can you come out to the house?"

"Okay. I'm on my way."

He hung up and tugged thoughtfully at his left earlobe. The woman had sounded serious. Shayne opened his drawer and took out his .45 automatic. He checked it, put on his shoulder holster, slipped the gun in, and went out.

"I'll be at Calhoun's house, Angel."

For the second time that day he made the drive to the expensive suburb. This time he parked in the car port, and strode to the side door, where the bullet hole was still clear. A big hole. The side door opened before he rang.

"Come in, Mr. Shayne," he said.

She was a tall, slender blond with a body that would have looked very good in a bikini, but looked good enough in a green mini-dress. She was younger than Calhoun, but not that young. Over thirty-five, but not much, and didn't look even near thirty. A rich and successful husband helps a woman's youth.

"I'm Celia Calhoun," she said as Shayne sat down in a fine, spacious, tasteful living room that hadn't been put together by any decorator. "I suppose John has mentioned me."

"Only that he doesn't want you hurt in any crossfire, so moved to

the club," Shayne said. "I'd rather get shot."

She laughed. "A very neat compliment, for an older lady. I wonder if we women ever get tired of the suggestion that we're wanted in the hay?"

The words, didn't seem either out-of-place or crass on her lips. A relaxed woman, yet there was something about her eyes. Deep, troubled, but strong brown eyes.

"Why did you want to see me, Mrs. Calhoun?"

Celia Calhoun didn't answer at once. She got up, found a cigarette, lighted it, but did not sit down again. "I'm worried and scared. John says he's told me everything, but I'm not sure."

"What did he tell you?" Shayne asked.

"That someone has been shooting at him. Some psycho, he says he thinks, and that you are trying to locate the man. He says he is quiet safe at his club, and you'll find the man soon."

"Most of that could be true."

"Could be?"

"We don't know who the sniper is. It probably is a psycho."

"Probably?" Celia Calhoun said. "That's what scares me. A psycho, irrational, I understand, although I don't understand about the police."

"What about the police?"

"If the man trying to shoot John is some irrational person, why hasn't he brought the police in? No, it isn't just some poor insane per-

son, is it? There's a purpose in it all."

"What purpose?"

"I don't know," he said, but her eyes said she was lying.

Shayne let the silence stretch. Then he said, "Tell me about your first husband, Mrs. Calhoun."

She just stared at Shayne. She walked across the room, going nowhere, just walking. Then she sat down. Her eyes were haunted now, hollow and afraid.

"So it is Conrad?"

Shayne didn't say anything.

VII

CELIA CALHOUN leaned forward, her arms across her body as if she had a pain deep in her belly. An old pain.

"Conrad and I were only married for two years, Conrad Van Kamp, the son of a rich, strong father. The weak son. We had one son, my son, and John has brought him up as his own. We had his name changed. No one knows he isn't John's son. How—"

"Joe Gross," Shayne said.

She nodded. "Yes, of course. I didn't know he knew, but I see he did. What can I say, Mr. Shayne? I married the wrong man, I had a son, I met John, and the rest, as they say, was history. I wasn't very moral or proper about it. I wouldn't think much of a woman who was when she was as much in love as I was with John."

"And Conrad was annoyed about losing his wife and son?"

She glanced up, her eyes angry and her face suddenly haggard as if she was sure Shayne was making fun of her. "Annoyed, Mr. Shayne?"

"Sorry," he said, "a lousy try at humor. Lighten the gloom, all that."

"Yes," she said, the anger gone and a weariness taking its place. "Conrad tried to kill John then—before we even married, John and I; before my divorce. He failed. As it happened, that was how I got the divorce. John got the divorce by using Conrad's attack on him as a sign of mental instability. He—he made a deal. He got Conrad off with an insanity plea on the attempted murder, and I got my divorce."

"And you think Van Kamp has come back."

"I don't know."

"Calhoun never mentioned Conrad as an enemy."

"I suppose he didn't want to rake up trouble for me," she said. "We never knew where Conrad went after he was released from the state hospital. He simply vanished."

"When was he released?"

"About four years ago."

"So he was inside for close to ten years?"

"Yes."

"Ten years changes a man, especially ten years like that. Not many men hold hate that long, especially

when a woman is the cause. Women fade in ten years. No offense."

"I know that, Mr. Shayne, but — there's the boy, my son. I wonder if that fades as fast as a faithless wife?"

Shayne was silent. She had a point. No, a stolen son didn't fade as fast. A stolen son could eat and eat at a man who sat in a mental cell and saw his whole world disintegrating.

"So you think the sniper is your first husband?"

"I don't know what to think," the beautiful blond said. "I know that John is hiding something. I know him very well, Mr. Shayne. I know his whole character and I know he's not telling anyone the whole truth. I've seen him, watched him. Something is gnawing at him more than the threat of death."

"But you can't think—" Shayne stopped.

A car had slowed in front of the house. It turned into the driveway and stopped. Shayne motioned Celia Calhoun to silence, and to cover in a corner. He drew his automatic and crossed silently to the main entrance hall. He stood where he could watch both front and side doors.

Footsteps crunched through the gravel to the side door. Fast footsteps, almost running, that made no attempt to hide. The side door burst open, and closed as fast. Shayne stepped out, his gun ready

and covering the man who leaned against the closed door.

He put his gun up. John Calhoun stepped into the entry hall away from the side door.

"I told you I wanted my wife out of this!" Calhoun snapped.

"She called me," Shayne said. "I need all the help I can get if I'm going to save your hide."

"I know she called you, damn it! Your girl told me. Did you have to come here?"

"Yes, I had to come. Now you'll tell me all of it, or I walk out and don't look back."

"All of it?" Calhoun said.

Celia Calhoun appeared. "I told him about Conrad, John."

"Which you damn well didn't," Shayne said. "You want to die?"

Calhoun paled, but didn't answer at once. The tall lawyer walked on into the living room and sat down. Celia Calhoun sat down, watching him. Calhoun looked up.

"I didn't want Conrad Van Kamp brought into this. He can't be the man, and I did enough to him a lot of years ago. As far as I know, up to two years ago, he was quietly trying to build some kind of life for himself in Cleveland."

"Why can't he be the man?" Shayne said.

"He just can't be, that's all. I had him checked carefully after he left the hospital. He's a beaten shell, and I want him left alone!"

"In Cleveland?" Shayne said. He was thinking about Andy Gradell,

who worked for the Cleveland family of the syndicate brotherhood, and who sometimes took outside contracts if the bosses approved. "Didn't Mrs. Calhoun say his father was rich? He must have money."

"Money isn't life," Shayne," Calhoun said. "All the money in the world won't build a life from nothing, and ten years in a mental hospital is very near to nothing. I am not proud of what we did then."

"Money can buy a killer, Calhoun," Shayne said.

"Buy?" Celia Calhoun said. "You think that the man trying to kill John is hired?"

"I'm about sure of it," Shayne said. "Which leaves us with the one question—who hired him? Conrad Van Kamp seems to have a reason."

"What?" Calhoun said. "You told me if a man wanted revenge he'd kill me, not make me sweat it out."

"If all he wanted was revenge, yes," Shayne agreed. "But maybe Conrad Van Kamp wants something else."

"What else, Mr. Shayne?" Celia Calhoun said.

The tone of her voice told Shayne that she had a pretty good idea what he had in mind.

He said it, "The boy, his son. Van Kamp shows he can kill Calhoun any time. Maybe next he shoots at you, Mrs. Calhoun. Then he makes his pitch—the boy back to him or you both die, or just one. A deal. Legally, a good lawyer like Calhoun



can arrange to give a boy back to his real father."

Calhoun jumped up, her face dead white, her hand in front of her mouth. "No! No! Never, I—"

"Stop it!" Calhoun cried, glared at Shayne. "Conrad isn't the man!" Stop scaring my wife half to death!"

"How do you know Conrad isn't the man?" Shayne said.

Calhoun licked his lips. "Because I know what the sniper wants."

Shayne stared at the tall lawyer.

VIII

JOHN CALHOUN sat with his hands clasped in front of him. "I knew the day after I hired you. He called

me. A man. A smooth, oily voiced man I hated at the first syllable."

"And you didn't tell me?"

"I thought, hoped, you could locate the man and stop him before I had to tell anyone."

"Why?"

Calhoun was up, pacing. "Because I might have to do what he wants, and if I do then I can't tell anyone. No one."

Celia Calhoun cried, "John! You hired Mr. Shayne!"

Shayne said. "If you don't tell me, or the police, then you will have to go through with it—or buy a casket. I mean it. This sniper knows his job. He'll get you."

Calhoun was a picture of fear and hate. "Then perhaps I'll have to buy a casket!"

"John!" Celia cried again, and swayed where she sat.

Calhoun hurried to her. He held her, whispered to her. She sat shivering. Her voice was low. "Please, John, tell him! Or send him away and do what that man wants. I don't care which. You must do something."

"She's right, Calhoun," Shayne said. I'll make it short and simple. I think I've found the sniper, but he's a hired hand. An expert. I doubt if I can find him in time, unless I have a lot more to go on. I can't even guarantee I can get him if I know all, but I sure as hell can't get anywhere unless I do."

The silence was thick in the room; heavy like a deadly contaminated

fog. Calhoun held his wife. She shivered, her brown eyes pleading. Calhoun took a shuddering breath.

"What he wants, Shayne, could cost my life even if I did it. If I don't do it, I'm dead. If I do it, and anyone knows, anyone at all who can or will tell it, then I'm just as good as dead."

"Illegal," Shayne says. "He wants you to fix a case, bribe a jury, something like that?"

"Yes. If I did it, and was caught, I would be disbarred."

"How would that help him? If it came out, it wouldn't count."

Calhoun was bitter. "He has it well figured. Very little chance of detection. You see, Shayne, he doesn't want me to get someone off; he wants me to make sure one of my clients is found guilty!"

Shayne blinked. His gray eyes were slits now. He rubbed at his gaunt chin. "Guilty? How can you do that?"

"That's the easy part, Shayne. To get someone off I'd have to work hard, bribe, cheat a little or a lot. But to make sure a man is guilty all I have to do is convince him to plead guilty—make a deal, con my own client!"

"And get away with it?"

"No trouble at all. I've got a spotless reputation. I win most of my cases. If I convince a client to plead guilty, no one will question his guilt. When I plead a man guilty, everyone assumes he is guilty, and

I'm getting him the lightest jolt any man could."

"But you don't want to do it?" Shayne said.

Calhoun stood up again, paced. "I can't do it! My whole life is against it. I don't know if I literally could do it, don't you see? I owe my life to the law, to justice, to protecting my clients. I don't know if I could. I don't know."

"Not to save your life?"

"Oh, John, please!" Celia Calhoun said.

Calhoun was ravaged in his face. "I don't know if I can!"

Calhoun squeezed his face between his hands as if to crush out the decision, the pain. Shayne watched him in the silence. Celia Calhoun sat as if stunned, unable to think or speak any further.

"Who does he want you to send over?" Shayne asked at last.

Calhoun shook his head. "I don't know yet. That's part of it all. He wouldn't tell me who. He said one of my personal cases, but I wouldn't find out until I stepped into court—or just before. I've been waiting all week, and I'm down to three cases I plead this week."

"Three more up for pleading?"

"Yes."

"You think it has to be one of the three?"

"Yes, the other cases in the works are too far gone."

"Tell me the three cases. I'll start working and hope we get an answer before he pinpoints the victim."

Calhoun shrugged. "What can it help to know the cases?"

"Let me figure that out," Shayne said.

"All right, yes. You're the expert," Calhoun agreed. He sat down, closed his eyes and leaned his head back as if that eased some pain. "First, Diego Sanchez. A small-time punk. Record as long as his age; in and out of jail all his life. He's up for breaking-and-entering, about the sixth time, and he's probably guilty as sin. It's a court-appointed case I'll farm out to one of my assistants after the pleading. I've got the assistant investigating it, and he'll probably recommend pleading guilty anyway."

Shayne wrote down the name, the charge, the address of Diego Sanchez."

"Second," Calhoun went on as if seeing it all inside, "there's J. Finlay Carter. Income-tax evasion. Carter is as sharp as a weasel's nose and twice as mean. All legal, of course. Only this time he made a mistake. He's guilty, too, but if I work it right I can get him off with a fine. If not, he'll take a long rap."

Shayne had Carter down. "Go on. Number three."

"Best of the lot," Calhoun said bitterly. "Wallace Reed, a truck driver of twenty-five years of age, earns \$110 a week in a good week. Married, no kids, lives in a polite slum. The court handed us this one, too. He's a mild, quiet fellow scared 90% to death to even be in jail."

He's up on a narcotics charge—peddling, not using. It means a long rap even if I deal, unless I can get him off."

"Can you?"

"I've got a chance. Narcotics charges are very tricky. The evidence is circumstantial on selling. He had the stuff in his apartment, lists of customers, etc. But no one saw him sell, not exactly. If I worked hard I could probably get him off on a use charge, much shorter jolt. On the other hand it wouldn't look bad if I made a deal to plead guilty and save him a few years."

"Could you get him acquitted?"

Calhoun opened his eyes, rubbed his jaw. "If I worked very hard, maybe, yes. He's got no record, a good background, and he actually isn't a user. I could go whole hog and try to get him off. Young, innocent couple framed and all that."

"Framed?" Shayne snapped.

"That's his story—never saw the stuff found in his apartment. Came home from a two-day haul, and the cops busted in and found the junk."

"Why was he framed?"

Calhoun nodded. "That's the problem. He can't think of a reason himself, and no one else can. The district attorney has leaned over backwards on the kid. He's a nice kid, but no one can come up with a ghost of a reason for framing him. The D.A. has to see it as a desperate story and nothing more."

"Everyone is framed," Shayne

said, "If he's caught cold. What does the wife say?"

"Nothing. She cries most of the time. Hasn't got any idea how the stuff got into the apartment. She works all day. For her it's really bad—Reed just got back from Viet Nam two months ago. Served over a year there."

Shayne considered. 'Circumstantial, but solid. A sure conviction—without you, right?"

"Yes. But I might get him off very light. Returned hero, young couple, no record, all that."

Shayne thought for some time. He looked at the notes he had taken. Celia Calhoun watched him the whole time, waiting for a word of hope. Calhoun had closed his eyes again, shutting it all out.

"They all look guilty," Shayne said at last, "and all probably wouldn't have a prayer without a lawyer of your caliber. But with you, they maybe have a chance. Sanchez looks like the surest to take the rap, despite your work, but he also looks like the one with connections who could want him out of the way."

"J. Finley Carter has more enemies than hair," Calhoun said.

"All right," Shayne said. "He sounds good to be wanted out of someone's way, and has the best chance of getting off. Reed looks like he has to take some jolt, and who would want him out of the way?"

"Unless he was framed. The rea-

son for the frame would tell us a lot," Calhoun said.

"If it was a frame," Shayne said. "I'll start working on it, but you can come out of hiding now, Calhoun. The sniper wants something; he won't kill you until it's done."

"And if it isn't done?" Calhoun said quietly.

Celia Calhoun gasped, and she looked at her husband as if he had lost his mind. Calhoun didn't look at her, only at Shayne. Shayne shrugged.

"I don't think you've got a worry. This man wants something; he's trying to scare you into it. If you don't scare, why would he shoot you later? He's got nothing to prove by killing you just to keep his word. You're not part of a group he wants to keep in line."

"And so you think I shouldn't play along? No real danger?"

"I don't see any. Not logical."

Celia Calhoun said, "And if the man isn't logical, Mr. Shayne? If you're wrong?"

Shayne nodded. "Okay, I'll find him in time. If I don't, it's up to the counselor."

"A man who would think up such a terrible scheme is capable of anything," Celia Calhoun said. "He could do anything if he was opposed, beaten."

"He could," Shayne said.

Calhoun said nothing. The tall lawyer had closed his eyes once more, sat immobile like a man already dead.



IX

MIKE SHAYNE had no trouble finding someone to talk about Diego Sanchez.

He drove down to the seedy address of the small-time crook, and stopped on the way to check with Lucy if any of his pigeons had called.

"No, Michael, but Lieutenant Bellows did. He said to tell you that Andy Gradell is reported in town."

"Thanks, Angel," Shayne said.

He continued on to the shabby rooming house where Diego Sanchez lived. As he parked and looked at the house, he wondered again why small-time criminals never learned. They lived their lives scared, hounded, in and out of pri-

son, and in their best moments lived alone in places like this rooming house. Only he knew the answer—they never knew any other way to live, to work, and if they weren't crooks they were nothing. They lived for the few brief moments of affluence, the flashing seconds when they had all they wanted before it collapsed.

The slatternly landlady of the rooming house knew all about Diego Sanchez. "Him? Sure, I know him. Lived here off and on when he's out of the can."

"You know his friends?"

"Sanchez never had no friends."

"Enemies, then."

"Who knows?"

"How about anyone who might want him out of the way? Did he ever act like he had a special enemy? Say anything that gave you any reason to think he was in trouble?"

"Nope. He only slept here."

Shayne showed the picture of Gradell. She looked at it, shook her head. "Never saw that one. He looks mean."

"He is. Where did Sanchez hang when he wasn't sleeping?"

"The Kat Klub, mostly, day and night. He even ate there, and the food is lousy."

Shayne went to the Kat Klub, two blocks over, one block up. It had nine-tenths naked girls pictured outside, needed paint, was a club to look at, but in the daytime was just another bar. Shayne went down.

Inside, the club was the same. It

needed dim light and enough booze inside to look like a club. In the light of day, through the open door it was old, dirty, shabby and smelled of stale food and beer. A bartender as dirty as the room wiped the bar with a rag on his way to Shayne.

"What'll it be, friend?"

"Beer," Shayne said, "and Diego Sanchez."

"Beer's easy," the bartender said, "what about Diego?"

"He's a regular in here?"

"More'n me. Not for a while, though. You want Diego, you better hurry, 'cause he's going away for a while."

"Anyone in particular want him to go away?"

"No one I know," the bartender said, but his voice had changed, and his face had gone stiff.

"I think he's in for large trouble," Shayne said. "I'd like to help him."

"That's real nice of you, Mr.—"

"Shayne, Mike Shayne."

"I'll let his friends know you want to help, if I ever find a friend of Diego's."

"You do that," Shayne said.

Out in the afternoon sun, the redhead thought for a time in his car. He also watched the door of the Kat Klub. No one came out or went in.

Shayne headed for the different world of J. Finlay Carter.

It was indeed a different world. Carter's office was in one of the newest, plushest buildings in Miami. The carpet on the corridors was

three inches deep. The carpet was a lot deeper than the smile on the faces of J. Finlay's two partners.

"We're sure Mr. Calhoun will see that justice is served, and Finlay will be exonerated quickly," Mathias Tompkins, the senior partner said.

"It's all a misunderstanding," Porter McGonigle, the third partner, informed Shayne. "A simple mistake in the books. It will all be straightened out in court."

Shayne said, "That's good to hear. I was afraid someone might be wanting J. Finlay to take the rap."

"Rap? You mean be convicted?" Mathias Tompkins said. "Now why on earth would anyone want that?"

"You don't happen to mean us, do you?" McGonigle said, his manner dropping about fifty degrees.

"I don't know who I mean," Shayne said mildly. "But I thought I'd just nose around and let people know what I'm thinking. You know anyone who might want to see Carter out of the way for a time. Preferably a long time?"

"Absolutely not!" McGonigle roared. "I'm damned if I like even the suggestion!"

Mathias Tompkins was more speculative. "Well, I would tend to agree with Porter, and certainly Carter is vital to our business, and it wouldn't help us."

"But?" Shayne said, hearing the but on the end.

"Well, I was thinking of his wife. Madge is a rather odd woman,

sometimes, considerably younger than Finlay."

"How much is considerably?" Shayne asked.

Porter McGonigle's attitude dropped all the way to the ice age. "Why don't you shut up, Mathias? Madge Carter isn't a woman to want her husband out of the way, and if she were she would just leave him."

"Really, Porter?" Mathias said mildly. "You're probably right, but it was a thought. She is twenty-one years younger, and I am of the opinion that Mr. Shayne here knows things that we don't."

"Then let him snoop on his own, damn it," McGonigle said.

Shayne just watched the partners for a moment. They struck him as sharp, tricky characters: Mathias Tompkins the old fox; McGonigle the much younger wolf. J. Finlay Carter was probably somewhere between—the not so very old shark. Shayne sensed that there was a lot of in-fighting in the partnership, and none of them averse to eating each other.

Mathias said, "You wouldn't like to let us know what ever gave you this idea, Mr. Shayne?"

"No, except that some pressure is being put on."

"I see," Mathias Tompkins said. "Pressure to convict, is that it? How strange. You would have thought the pressure would be the opposite if it were one of us. I mean, if Fin-

lay is convicted of the tax charge, it will hurt our reputation very much."

It was a point. "I suppose it would. How about personal reasons?"

"I've heard enough of this," McGonigle said, and stalked out.

Shayne watched the younger man go. "Touchy, isn't he?"

"No," Mathias Tompkins said, "not as a rule. Ice-water, I would have said. Odd."

Tompkins said no more. Shayne left. He had reservations about the two partners. Mathias Thompkins seemed calm enough, but he was an old fox. His point about the company reputation had been good—unless there was something else. It might do to have the books checked for some tricks.

Porter McGonigle had reacted a little too much. Why? Shayne had a hunch.

X

THE HOME OF J. Finlay Carter was half the size of the Taj Mahal, and twice as gaudy. Carter was a man who believed in very conspicuous consumption. In the late afternoon sun, the mansion glittered like gold and diamonds. It probably gave Carter a feeling of comfort.

Shayne had already checked with Calhoun to be sure that the businessman, out on bail, of course, wasn't home. Calhoun had agreed to keep Carter in conference downtown. Shayne rang the doorbell.

"Yes?" A tall Filipino answered the door.

"I'd like to see Mrs. Carter."

"Sorry," the Filipino said, and started the door closed.

Shayne had his foot in it. "Mr. Calhoun sent me."

The Filipino didn't bat an eye, but bowed Shayne in and vanished. A loud voice, female, echoed through the house. It came from somewhere upstairs. The Filipino re-appeared, and motioned Shayne to follow him to the rear.

He followed. They went through the vast manse, and up the rear stairs. The Filipino pointed to an open door on the second floor, and vanished again. Shayne went through the door.

"What does the shyster want?" the female voice said.

She was small, round, beautiful every inch the woman who made her way in the world as a woman. Her eyes said, unasked, when she saw Shayne, that she would be willing to lend him the benefit of her training right then if he had a mind.

"Mrs. Carter?" he said instead.

"Madge. What does Calhoun want? Isn't he getting paid enough to whitewash Finlay?"

"I wouldn't know," Shayne said. "I'm wondering who's getting paid to tar Finlay with very black paint."

She sat up, and Shayne saw that she was younger, more beautiful, and a lot less hard. "What does that mean, Mr.—"

"Mike Shayne," he said, "and it

means someone looks like they're trying to make sure your husband goes to prison."

She blinked. Shayne realized that she was three-quarters drunk. A beautiful, sexy, maybe even stupid woman, but she was not happy the way a beautiful, stupid woman is supposed to be.

"Prison? Make sure?" she said, almost as if she wanted to be sure her hearing was still good. She stopped, thought for a time, then blinked again at Shayne. "You're a big man. Big. I think I could like you."

"Who wants Mr. Carter in prison, Mrs. Carter?"

"Madge," she said. "Can you stay a while?"

"I don't think it's business reasons," Shayne said. "It would be bad for the company to have him convicted."

"Business?" she said. "No, not business. Not his business. Maybe my business, yes, but not his. Will he go to jail?"

"It depends," Shayne said. "Who wants him in jail? You?"

"Me?" her eyes widened—soft, deep eyes but drunk—and she reached down to where Shayne couldn't see beside her chair and came up with a glass and bottle. She poured. She drank. "I don't know what I want. I never do, funny. I want you right now. I never know what I want until I see it. Finlay always says that, and that's why he makes sure I see him first

thing in the morning, last thing at night."

"Maybe Porter McGonigle?" Shayne said.

"Maybe Porter, sure," Madge Carter said. "You think Porter wants my husband out of the way?"

"It crossed my mind."

"I wonder if it crossed Porter's mind," she said, and drank. "You fell like staying here a while? I'm in the mood."

Shayne watched her and saw it happening. She was one of those people who come to life when drunk. She had been drunk, and had been sobering up, tapering off, when Shayne had walked in, and that had made her slow, thick. Now, as the booze hit her again, her alertness came back, and with it the hardness and the cunning. A woman who thought best neither drunk nor sober, but only when half drunk with the booze still strong in her.

"I'll find out if someone wants Mr. Carter put away," Shayne said.

"I'll bet you will. Tell me who it is, okay?"

"It won't be hard to find out if you're playing footsie with McGonigle."

"Yes it will, red-headed big man, yes it will. Finlay is my fortune. I'm careful."

"Careful games maybe aren't enough for Porter McGonigle."

"You could be right, or you could be wrong. Now come over here, or blow."

Shayne blew. And thought all the

way back to his car. He was all but sure Madge Carter and Porter McGonigle were playing some game—but did that mean McGonigle, or the wife, would go so far to send Carter away?

He called Lucy from a booth. Calhoun had not called her. It was almost time for dinner. He decided to stop for dinner before going after the last of the three cases: Wallace Reed. But before dinner he made a stop in Lieutenant Bellows' office.

“Diego Sanchez?” Bellows said. “You want to know what his chances are?”

“That's it, George.”

Bellows made an inter-office call. Neither man said much while they waited. Bellows made it obvious he was simply biding time until Shayne decided to tell him what was going on. Soon a uniformed man came in with a file. Bellows opened it, read the last few pages.

“Nice clean record—all bad. At least one arrest every year, mostly small. Up on breaking-and-entering right now. He might get off on that, got assigned Calhoun himself by the court, and the evidence isn't perfect.”

“You think Calhoun can get him off?”

“If anyone can,” Bellows said. “It doesn't matter. We've got a second charge waiting, assault-with-intent, and if that doesn't stick, Georgia has a good charge of armed robbery. On top of which he's a parole violator in Louisiana.”

“It looks bad for him, then?”

“As bad as it can get. He'll go away for a while.”

Shayne thanked Bellows, who was thinking hard as he looked at Diego Sanchez's record file. Shayne let him think. He went out for some dinner. It was all late sun now, and only one case to go after dinner.

Calhoun had not called.

XI

THE APARTMENT house of Wallace Reed was in a poor, but clean section of Miami. A small apartment house, four stories, with two apartments on each floor. Children played in the evening sun on the quiet street, and mothers leaned at windows in the kind of peace only the honest, poor and content know. Not really poor, of course, just without money to do more than needed to stay comfortably. Neither hungry nor ambitious. Small people who didn't mind being small except once or twice a year on bad days.

The Reeds lived on the third floor. Shayne rang. The buzzer answered, and he climbed the stairs. She was waiting for him in her open doorway, where she could see him reach the landing so she could close the door in plenty of time if she didn't like the look of him.

“Mrs. Reed?” Shayne said.

She was like a shy kitten in the doorway, ready to fly back inside if he came too close. He stopped. Her



eyes were a dark blue under long soft lashes.

"Yes, I'm Mrs. Reed. What do you want?"

"Some talk about your husband," Shayne said.

She started to close the door: "Go away."

"I'm from his lawyer, Mrs. Reed. Mr. Calhoun. We want to know more about Wallace to help his defense."

She just started. "What can help him?"

"You want him free, don't you?"

She nodded as if somehow she hadn't thought about the idea of him being free again. "Come in, please."

The 'please' came late but quick, like a child suddenly remembering

to be polite, remembering to be nice. She backed inside and Shayne followed. The apartment was small but pleasant. The size of the rooms cut down to make up all the proper number of rooms. Everything neat and clean, but poor — poorer even than most of the neighborhood. The cheap boxwood, paper and cardboard furniture you can buy at the dime store all painted to look real.

Furniture that looked like it had been given, or bought, in the first few weeks of marriage, and nothing much had changed since. A treadmill, going nowhere, except maybe down. Only the woman did not look cheap and worn and going nowhere. There was a color to her oval face, a flush of life and youth despite her troubles.

"Sit down, please," she said. "Mr. Calhoun is good to try to help us, poor like we are. I mean, he gets paid a lot."

"It's his job," Shayne said. "I'm Mike Shayne, by the way."

"I'm happy to know you, Mr. Shayne," she said, her voice low and nice. "You said you could help Wally's defense?"

"I said we want to know more about him to help his defense. For instance, how long had he been back from Viet Nam?"

"Two months."

"Had you ever spotted any drugs in the apartment before?"

"Never! Wally didn't—I mean, doesn't take drugs."

"He was away for two days?"

"Yes, on a job in the truck."

"Where were you the day he came back?"

"At work. We met here when I got home. We're trying to save money."

"How did the cops find the junk?"

"We never knew. They just came in. They had a warrant. They found the—the dope inside the bedpost of our bed. With—some kind of list. I don't know."

"They had a tip, the cops?"

"I never knew, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne watched her. "It's important. Did they have a tip, or had they been watching Wallace, following him?"

"I—I think they said they'd had their eye on him and his truck," she stammered. "Is that good? Or bad?"

"Bad," Shayne said. "Mrs. Reed, do you know of any reason someone would want your husband sent away for a long time?"

"Sent away?" She said, puzzled, and then her dark blue eyes widened. "You mean to prison? No! I don't know anyone! Mr. Calhoun said he maybe could get Wally off with —"

"I know he did, and I'm pretty sure he will," Shayne said, "but somebody maybe doesn't want Wally to get off light. You can't think of anyone? Any enemies he has?"

"Wally doesn't have an enemy in the world!"

"Okay," Shayne said, and pro-

duced his picture of Gradell. "Do you know this man?"

She looked at the picture. "No."

"Sure?"

"Of course I'm sure."

Shayne nodded slowly. "All right. Mrs. Reed, if Wally has no enemies you know about, maybe he has enemies, or friends, who you don't know about. Did he ever give any hint of being mixed up in dope-selling, smuggling, all that?"

"No!"

"He was in Viet Nam a long time, and a lot of drugs come in from the Orient. He drives a truck, and trucks are good for hiding junk and transporting it. Maybe Wallace knows too much about too many people and they want him on ice."

"But how could he be—" She stopped, blinked, her wide blue eyes clouding. "If—there was a man. He came here just before Wally got back from Viet Nam. An ugly man, slimy. He asked about Wally, and when I said Wally wasn't home yet, he seemed kind of surprised, and he almost ran off like he'd made a mistake."

"Do you remember what he looked like?"

"I'll never forget. Short, dark, a mustache and a limp in his left leg. A scar on his left cheek. It was that running off that scared me. Then later, when the police —"

Shayne studied her. "You think your husband is guilty, Mrs. Reed?"

Her dark blue eyes seemed to be in a mortal struggle with herself.

"I don't know what to think, Mr. Shayne."

Her face was a mask of pain, confusion and a terrible struggle to understand.

"But you can't think of anyone who would want Wally to go to prison for a long time?"

"No," she said, and her voice was down to a whisper.

Shayne left her sitting in her clean, tiny, nowhere living room. In the corridor he stopped to light a cigarette, and to think. Diego Sanchez looked out. No one had to force Calhoun to plead Sanchez guilty to put him away.

The other two — maybe. There seemed to be a certain number of questions and questionable people.

"Ssst! You there!"

A door was open at the end of the landing. A face peered out, and a hand beckoning Shayne in.

XII

MIKE SHAYNE went into the apartment. A small, fat old man leaned against the door — after peering but once and checking the corridor with eager, excited, and conspiratorial eyes.

"You a cop?" the little old man said.

"Private," Shayne said.

"Shamus, huh? Wait a minute — Shayne, Mike Shayne! Sure, I read the papers, all them books the guy wrote about you."

"Some of it's true," Shayne said. "You want to tell me something?"

"Frank Bend, that's me. I know all about shamus work. You working on that Wally Reed narcotic bust?"

"In a way," Shayne said.

"For or against?"

"For or against who, Mr. Bend?"

"The little wife."

"Neutral. I'm working for Reed's lawyer."

"Calhoun? Lucky break for the kid, eh? The big man himself. So you're trying to find out if the kid's really guilty?"

"Just the truth, Mr. Bend. Calhoun thinks the boy may be innocent."

Bend nodded. "Don't know about that. I like the boy. Don't get me wrong. But I got eyes. and I believe in the truth."

"What did your eyes see, Mr. Bend?"

"A man. Don't know who it was, but he come to the Reed apartment a few times. I say I don't know who he was, but I sure know the type."

"Short, dark mustache, limp?" Shayne asked.

Bend shook his head. "Nothin' like that. Smooth, real smooth. Five hundred dollar suit, dead eyes, you know? I mean, real killer eyes that look at you like you was a walking corpse. Not big, not small. Medium and in good shape for his age — maybe fifty, maybe forty-five. The kind of face gets worked on by a

barber every day, and knows it's boss."

"He came to Reed?"

"To the apartment. I seen him twice. Only Reed wasn't there, see? It was months ago. Reed was still in Viet Nam."

"This man came to see Mrs. Reed?"

"Don't know, Shayne. You got to stop jumpin' to answers, right?" the little old man said. "He come here, twice I seen. He went in to Reed's place, he don't stay long. That's all I really know—except little Mrs. Reed, she used to go out a lot. Alone, but out a lot when Wally was away."

"Do you think Reed is guilty?"

"No," the old man said. "He's no junk peddler."

Shayne watched the old man and considered. A crank? A nut who liked Wally Reed? A busybody who saw hanky-panky under every skirt below thirty? No, not a busybody, but mabe a crank hipped on amateur detecting. Or just a plain nut who saw visions?

"What do you think is up?" Shayne said.

"Don't know, like I said. Just reporting what I seen. It maybe something, maybe nothing. The guy I saw could have been in some deal with Reed, or maybe just trying to pressure him into a deal. Maybe getting Reed to bring some stuff back from the Orient, see? I don't know."

"Okay, Mr. Bend, and thanks. Keep your eyes open."

"Sure thing, always," the old man said, beaming.

Shayne went out and down to his car. The children still played in the street although it was dusk now, almost dark over the city. Mothers were calling from windows in the timeless pattern of mothers summoning their young in from the city streets.

He stopped ten paces from the door of the apartment house. His car was across the street. It was not alone. Two men stood near it in the shadows of a doorway. Just leaning there, innocent. But Shayne knew them, and they weren't innocent.

They wore light topcoats even in the Miami heat, and hats low over cold eyes. Hoods had the marks of their profession, like everyone else. A kind of arrogant power and a childish manner of despising all honest people. He even recognized the smaller of the two—Jake Musso, alias Johnny Mack.

He had no more time to think about them, and no need to wonder what they were doing. They saw him, saw that he had spotted them, and came out of their doorway. Shayne spun on his heel and headed away at an angle. They speeded up behind him.

He reached an alley. He turned in and began to run. He heard the pounding of their feet behind him. The alley went through to the next

block. He turned left, and down into the cellar stairs of the first building. Ran through the cellar passageway and out again into the backyard and the service alley that paralleled the streets. He went over a fence, crouched down next to it.

The footsteps pounded into the alley on the other side of the fence and pounded past. Then they stopped. One set of steps came back, and a head peered over the fence just above Shayne. The redhead reached up, clamped both hands around the man's neck, and hauled him over.

Jake Musso fell flat on his back, his gun flying away, his neck twisted. Shayne leaped on him, locked his arm in a breaking judo grip. Musso yelled.

"Who sent you, Johnny?" Shayne snapped.

"You're breaking my arm, you bastard!"

"It's a pleasure," Shayne said, with a wolfish grin. "You work for Obie Samson, check? What does Samson want with me?"

"Go to hell, peeper!"

Shayne twisted. Musso, alias Johnny Mack, groaned through clenched teeth.

"What makes Samson interested in me, Johnny?"

"Nothin'!"

"Where's Andy Gradell, Johnny?" Shayne snapped, twisting the gunman's arm.

"Owww! Never — heard of him! You —"

Shayne heard the other hood running back on the far side of the fence. He swivelled and held his pistol ready. The hood peered over, gun out. Shayne shot his arm. The hood screamed and fell backwards out of sight.

Shayne twisted Johnny Mack's arm. "Is Samson out to send someone up for a stretch, Johnny?"

"I don't know!" Mack tried, almost screamed with the pain. "He just tells me work you over some, a warning."

"Okay, now you warn him — lay off me and start running," Shayne said, and gave Mack, alias Musso's arm a hard twist.

The gunman screamed and passed out.

Shayne was up and looked over the fence, carefully. The other gunman was gone.

Shayne went through the nearest building back to his car.

XIII

LUCY HAMILTON was still in the office despite the late hour.

"Nothing from your informants, Michael, but Mr. Calhoun called. He's at his office."

"Okay, Angel, get me my file on Obie Samson," the redhead said, and strode on into his private office.

Mike Shayne did not think he was going to hear from his stool-pigeons this time. Not with Obie Samson in the picture. When Lucy brought his file on Samson, he

studied it for some minutes, and then tossed it on his desk. What the devil did a top racket man like Obie Samson want with any of the three cases Calhoun had? Had Calhoun lied to him after all?

Samson fitted with Andy Gradell all right. Samson was a top member of the Miami family of the brotherhood. But what did a man like Samson have to do with a two-bit punk, a big-shot businessman, or a small-time junk peddler? Samson never touched dope; like the late Vito Genovese himself he was against the traffic now.

Was Reed a member of the Miami family who had broken the code and dealt in dope? Was Samson punishing him hard? Somehow, Shayne couldn't read the young truck driver in the brotherhood. J. Finlay Carter? Dealing with Samson? A muscle-in on legit business?

Shayne sighed, and called Calhoun.

"Shayne?" Calhoun said at once, and Shayne heard the tone of the lawyer's voice.

"He called?" Shayne snapped. "Who is it?"

"Wallace Reed," Calhoun said. "I plead him tomorrow, and they want me to plead him guilty to peddling. It'll be a hard sentence, Shayne, and I don't know if I can get away with it."

Shayne held the phone in a hard grip. "Reed? Have you had a chance to talk to him?"

"Yes, and he swears he doesn't

know why anyone would want him sent away."

"Get me a pass to see him, and be there yourself!"

Shayne hung up, and grabbed his panama. He strode out through his outer office. "Go home, Angel, and stay home. It's down to the hard part now."

"What will you do, Michael? One day?"

"I don't know, but at least we know what the damned sniper wants now."

He went down to his car, and drove across town to the jail. Calhoun was there. Together they went to the interrogation room. Two guards brought Wallace Reed in, and stood silently waiting in the corners.

"Hello, Wallace," Calhoun said.

He was a slender young man, pale and stoop-shouldered, with an intense, brooding face. His dark eyes had the wariness of an animal, and a hard center of bitterness.

"What do you want, Calhoun?"

"Not me," Calhoun said. "Mr. Shayne here. Shayne is a private detective I've hired to work on the case."

Reed looked slowly at Shayne. "What case?"

"Your case, Reed," Shayne said.

Reed curled his lip. "What is there to work on? The police found the dope. I don't know how it got there or why."

"Reed," Shayne said, "there's

more. Someone is very anxious for you to go to prison."

"Is that supposed to surprise me?"

"No. I mean someone really trying. The drug charge isn't good enough for someone," Shayne said.

Reed hunched, looked at him. "Not good enough? What more do they want?"

"You might get a deal — first offense, war record, youth, all that. Someone doesn't want you to get a deal. Somone wants you to take the full jolt for drug peddling, go away for a very long time."

Reed was silent. He just looked out of those dark, wary, bitter eyes at Shayne. Then he shivered once. But he still said nothing at all.

Shayne said, "If someone wants you gone that badly, Reed, you've got to have some idea about who."

Reed said, "But I don't. Who? Why? I don't know! I've been in Viet Nam for over a year. In the army two years. Back only a couple of months. Who wants me in jail so bad?"

"Damn it," Shayne snapped, "you've got to know!"

"Well I don't!"

Shayne stared at the young man. Somehow he believed Reed, and yet it was almost impossible to believe.

"Do you know Obie Samson?" Shayne said.

"Who? Samson? Never heard — Hold it, yes! Wait! Obie Samson. Maybe a year or so ago, before I went to Viet Nam, I had a leave,



and my wife took me to a party where she works. There was a young guy there name of Samson."

"Young?"

"Yeah. I remember, 'cause I kidded her about it. The guy seemed to like her, and —"

Reed stopped, and his face lost what little color it had had. He seemed to be seeing back, far back, to that party over a year ago. "You mean — No!"

"Obie Sansom isn't young, Wallace."

Reed seemed to breathe again. "I guess it was nothing."

Shayne didn't push it. He studied the young man for another few seconds. Then he said, "Where does your wife work, Reed?"

"At a joint called Alice's Boutique. Sort of a dress place."

Shayne stood up. His mind was

busy behind his impassive face. Alice's Boutique. You never knew when the pieces began to fall into place. Gradell's trail led him to Alice's Boutique, and now Mrs. Wallace Reed was at Alice's Boutique.

"All right, Reed," Shayne said. "We'll be back."

"I'm not going anywhere," Reed said.

Outside the jail, Calhoun looked at Shayne. The tall lawyer was more haggard than ever.

"Do you have an idea, Shayne?"

"An idea, not much more."

Calhoun nodded. "You've got about sixteen hours. After that I'll have to trust to fortune."

"You won't plead him guilty to the big charge?"

"I can't, Shayne," Calhoun said, his eyes as scared as any eyes Shayne had ever seen, but scared or not they were determined. "I don't think I could make it work, and I won't try. I won't betray the law to save my life."

Shayne nodded. "I don't think it'll come to that. I think I can stop it in time."

"I hope you can," Calhoun said.

Shayne said nothing more. He went to his car, and Calhoun went back to his office.

XIV

IN THE DARK the small apartment house of Wallace Reed looked forlorn. Night isn't kind to shabbiness.

No children played now, and no mothers leaned in the sunny windows.

Mike Shayne went up almost reluctantly. She was waiting again in the doorway to the small apartment. She was young and pretty, but this time there was something more in her eyes — not the soft innocence he had seen the first time. He was coming back, and her eyes had taken on a faint hard shine.

"Yes, Mr. Shayne?" she said, quietly but not so soft now.

"Just a few more questions I forgot the first time," Shayne said.

"Well, I really don't see what else I can tell you or Mr. Calhoun."

"Let's find out," Shayne said, and gently, but with definite pressure, moved her back inside the room.

She gave up gracefully, but not happily. She sat down in the living room. Shayne watched her. The kitten was older, in a matter of minutes.

The shy innocent neither so shy nor so innocent. Or was it only that Shayne was seeing her with new eyes?

"When did you meet Obie Sansom, Mrs. Reed?"

Her face was a mask, absolutely still."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Shayne."

He shook his head. "It's too obvious now, Mrs. Reed. All of it. You're a pretty girl, maybe more ambitious in this world than you look. You married young. You're

young husband went away for two years, the last year all the way away. When he came back he was what? A truck driver."

"You better leave, Mr. Shayne. I don't have to sit and listen to slander."

Even her voice had changed, the stammering softness all gone. In its place was not a brittle voice, but an older voice, the voice of a woman, not a girl. Shayne didn't move.

"I suppose it was being alone, and working down there at Alice's Boutique. You meet a lot of men at a place like that who know how to talk to a woman, who want women, who are willing to pay for the woman they want. Older men, not boys like Wallace. Men with pocket money that could buy everything in this apartment. Even you."

"Get out!"

Shayne shrugged "I'm not saying anything against you. Why not? It's a terrible realization for a woman when she first knows that by saying a few words she can have overnight what it will take her young husband twenty years to get—if he ever gets it. Love is nice, but even that isn't much when he's thousands of miles away."

She said, "All right. Talk. I don't know where you're getting these nutty ideas, but go ahead."

"I'm getting them from logic," Shayne said. "Wallace doesn't know who wants him out of the way. I believe him. I already traced the

man who wants him put away to Alice's Boutique. A man was seen coming here—and he fits the description of Samson, and not young Samson. Obie himself, the boss, the hard man."

"That's a lie!"

"No it isn't. It must have been fun while Wallace was away, but he came back, didn't he? Okay, I'll give you credit. Maybe you wanted it to end with Obie, but nothing ends with Obie until he wants it to end. I figure you told him you had a husband, you'd think about it after Wallace was back awhile."

She started to speak, and stopped, watched her hands in her lap. There might have been a tear. She brushed at her face.

"Let's say you did tell Samson to wait. Obie Samson is used to getting what he wants his way. You let him think maybe he could have you if Wallace wasn't around. Obie's married, of course, but that wouldn't bother him, and you want what he'll give. So when he set up the frame on Wallace you looked the other way."

"Prove it, you—"

"I don't have to. Obie is a careful man. He wants no public scandal. But he wants you. An open break with Wallace would get out. From what I've seen of Wallace, if you asked for a divorce, he'd find out why, and Obie wants it all quiet. Only his little frame ran into a snag—John Calhoun."

"He expected a quick arrest, a

quick trial of a nobody, and a quick ten-twenty jolt in prison. No divorce, just a free hand for him on you. But Calhoun's the best lawyer in Miami, maybe in the country. Calhoun might get Wallace off, or a very light jolt. So Obie Samson wants to make sure. That was his mistake."

"Make sure?" she said.

"That's right. A little pressure on Calhoun to send Wallace over. Only —"

The shadow on the drawn shade was tall and deadly, a shadow with a gun on the fire escape. Shayne didn't wait.

He hurled himself across the room behind a couch and kicked at the light as he went.

The light crashed the room into darkness just as the first shot exploded from the open window.

Shayne felt the impact of the bullet into the couch, had his own gun out, fired at the window. There was a grunt.

Mrs. Reed was at the open door, screaming. "Here! Here!"

Someone, more than one, pounded up the stairs from below. Shayne went out through the door, knocking the small woman down as he passed. He went up to the fourth floor, and on up the ladder to the roof.

In the night he looked quickly around. The roofs on the block all adjoined. The men were pounding up behind him, and someone came

up over the edge of the fire escape. Shayne ran left across the roofs.

He reached three roofs down before they saw him. They came on. He fired three careful shots. Two went down, the rest dove for cover. Shayne slipped into the building and ran on down to the street. He ran for his car, got in, drove off as his pursuers appeared from the building.

The instant he was out of sight, he doubled back and parked where he could watch the apartment house from a new direction. He waited, his gray eyes down to steel points. He had hit at least two. Obie Samson would be plenty mad — and wary.

Five minutes later he saw them come down — three men and Mrs. Reed. A long, black car glided up to the curb from nowhere. The young wife got in. The three men headed for their own car. The black limousine pulled away and the other car followed at a good distance for protection.

Shayne had to wait until the second car passed. Then he followed.

XV

THE TWO CARS headed north and then went out of the city. At first Mike Shayne had no trouble following the bodyguard car and the limousine ahead. He was careful. These men were not amateurs, and they had been tailed before.

Ten miles out of the city the

bodyguard car began to make turns into side roads. Shayne hung on. He could still see the limousine head in the lights of the bodyguard car. They reached a main highway west and began to pick up speed. Locked like that, the three cars raced on along the dark highway.

Then Shayne realized he was gaining on the cars ahead. He slowed. Soon after that they turned off into a dirt road. The redhead drove on past the road, stopped, turned and drove back. He parked at the edge of the highway, and made his way through the trees toward where he saw the two cars parked at a large, dark house.

Lights went on in the house. Shayne watched the shades being drawn and shadows moving inside. He crept closer, alert for guards left outside. He saw none. His eyes narrowed. That wasn't right. Obie Samson was smarter than that, and he had no doubt who had been in the limousine that picked up Mrs. Reed.

Then he swore.

Hard but silently. He was looking at the limousine—it was not the same limousine!

They had tricked him neatly.

Somewhere along the roads a second limousine had taken the place of the real one. They had spotted him, probably from the very start. No, better than that. Obie Samson had anticipated that he would follow, had set up the guard car in the rear to keep him at a distance

from the limousine so that he would miss the substitution.

Samson and Mrs. Reed were safely holed up—or back in Miami already, to make sure that their pressure on Calhoun was going to work. Safe from Shayne, who didn't have a shred of proof against anyone about anything. No proof, only certainty, and the certainty scared the hell out of him now.

He drove scared all the way back to Calhoun's office. The tall lawyer was burning the midnight oil for his court date in the morning. He listened to Shayne, his face showing neither fear nor emotion now that he had come to terms and made his decision.

"So there it is," Shayne said. "Obie Samson wants Mrs. Reed. The lady is willing, apparently, or Obie thinks she will be once hubby is out of the way. He, Obie, needs it quiet and smooth. But Obie wants the woman, and when Obie Samson wants something, I'm scared."

"Will he try to kill me when I get Reed off light, maybe off all the way?"

"I don't know. I admit that now. What I said earlier, about the sniper having no reason to kill you after Reed was free was true. But that wasn't with Obie Samson in the picture. Obie is a killer, a hard man, a mad dog. He might be the one man in Miami who thought he couldn't let you get away with defying him. I don't know."

Calhoun nodded. "Very well. What do we do?"

"You're determined to do your best for Reed?"

"Yes. I can't do anything else."

"All right. Then listen. Someone has to give the signal to the sniper. I'm assuming that Samson will want to strike fast. So there'll be a signal, and when you go out, that's the time of danger. I want you to stall and stall, and don't come out until you get the signal."

"You'll try to trap the sniper?"

"Yes. In the long run, counselor, it's the only way to give you any peace."

"I know, and it's what I want. I'd rather be bait than a sitting duck. You'll try it alone?"

"Not if I'm in my right mind. It's time to bring in the police. They can't do much. We don't have a shred of proof against anyone, but they'll give me the help to protect you. We'll blanket the courthouse area."

"And if he doesn't try tomorrow, at once?"

"Then we'll find Samson, and we'll find Gradell. After tomorrow we'll find them, believe me. Tonight it wouldn't help to look for them, they'll be holed up good waiting for you to do what they want. They won't move until they find out what you do."

"Of course," Calhoun said. "Then I suppose we all try for some sleep."

"It'd help," Shayne said.

But when he left he did not go to sleep. He went to police headquarters. Will Gentry was back. The gruff Chief of Police listened to Shayne's story.

"You could have brought us in, Mike."

"No, I couldn't. I had nothing to tell you. Now I do."

"Okay, let's get Bellows and go to work."

Shayne left Lieutenant Bellows studying the area around the courthouse. He himself had one last desperate hope—he went and staked out the empty apartment of Mrs. Wallace Reed. There was a chance, if a small one, that Samson, or Mrs. Reed, would go back to the apartment, sure they had fooled Shayne all the way.

But they didn't come. No one came, and Shayne dozed in his car until dawn tinted the sky and it was the day.

XVI

BELLOWS DISPOSED his men around the courthouse. The lieutenant wasn't happy.

"It's wide open. Too many buildings. We can't block them all."

"I'll tell Calhoun exactly how to walk out, and what route to take. That way we can cut down the positions he can firm from. They know Calhoun will be looking, so he can keep his eyes open for any movement. Anyway, only certain places will qualify, George. It'll be

midday, the offices busy. You should be able to cover the roofs, the few empty rooms they could use."

"You make it sound easy. I don't have a regiment."

"We'll do it; let's work."

Mike Shayne went carefully through the buildings. To be sure of a shot, Gradell would want to be higher than the third floor, lower than the tenth. Three of the buildings were less than ten stories high. But Bellows was right: there were an awful lot of rooms to fire from.

Then Shayne saw it—the best chance. He hurried down to Bellows. "George, we'll have Calhoun come out the side door with Reed. It opens into that narrow area, right? There can't be five places to get a good shot to there. We'll have the cars close enough to give the sniper little time."

Bellows saw it. "Good! We should be able to cover."

Shayne tugged at his car. "I hope it isn't too good. We don't want to scare him off for a shot somewhere else, at some other time. We've got one advantage—he won't know exactly how Calhoun is coming out until just before he does. He'll have to get into position fast."

"What makes you so sure he'll try, Mike?"

"Because if I'm right, I know how Obie Samson thinks. How all the Obie Samsons in this world think, George. He'll want to teach his lesson hard and sure—instant retrи-



bution for the man who crosses him. His whole power rests on that, George. No boss or under-boss could hold his job a day without everyone knowing that no one crosses him and lives long. The faster, the better his message."

"All right," Bellows said. "The way you've got it set we should get him. Make sure Calhoun gives him time to get into position."

"I will," Shayne said.

Under the new plan, Bellows sent his men to watch the places a sniper could shoot from. Shayne went into the courthouse to find Calhoun when the time was right, ten o'clock. He found the tall law-

yer with his client. Reed looked paler than ever.

"All set?" Calhoun said.

"Change of plan. You'll go out the side exit when it's over. Take your time, to give the sniper time. Keep your eyes open for any movement in any building, and your knees bent to hit the ground. How about you, Reed?"

"What about me? You tell me my wife is helping a man send me away. Am I supposed to be happy?"

"You'd rather go to prison? Rot there?"

Reed waved at the air. "No, I wouldn't. But I just happen to love her, Shayne. What does a man do inside when he loves a woman, and he's told she's after a rich crook and is going to ruin his life to get the guy?"

"I can't answer that," Shayne said. "Only you can."

"Yeah," the young man said, and walked to the barred window. He stood there, thin and round-shouldered, looking out at the sun and the silent buildings where a sniper could be lurking even now.

Calhoun said. "Tell me the new plan."

Shayne told him. Calhoun listened carefully, nodding each few seconds. "Where will you be?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe I'll hang in the courtroom to see if I can spot the signal man."

After that there was nothing left to do. Shayne wandered around the courthouse, looking out windows,

trying to spot anything suspicious in the streets or on the buildings. It was too much to hope that Obie Samson himself would show. The syndicate boss had to know that Shayne had figured it out.

But it was one thing to figure it out and another thing to prove it.

An hour passed, and Shayne was feeling like a caged lion. If it went wrong? If Andy Gradell wasn't spotted in time?

Shayne stopped in his tracks. What if Samson, realizing his scheme had been spotted, changed his method? It wasn't likely that Samson could have guessed that Shayne was on to Gradell—but Samson had to know that Shayne knew he, Samson, was behind the sniping.

He hurried down to the alley. Bellows was there already.

"If he changes his hit method?" Shayne said.

Bellow nodded. "I thought of that. We'll have men in the alley. If he tries a close hit, we'll get him then, too."

"Okay. Now Calhoun comes left in the alley, and that takes him into range of the front street buildings only. We don't want to have to cover both streets."

"Check. Reed goes right to the paddy wagon to be taken back to jail. No sense putting him in the line of fire."

"That's it. We'll have enough people in the alley so the sniper

has to take his time. We should get him if he tries, Mike."

Shayne nodded, but he was nervous. The tension was building. It was a good plan, but no plan was fool-proof. He went back up. Court was now in session. He slipped into the back and his gray eyes studied all the people. There weren't many. One man caught his eye.

A small, quiet man holding what looked like a small black case. From time to time the man seemed to bend toward the case—with his ear, and then his mouth. A radio!

Shayne watched him. The case was proceeding smoothly. Calhoun made his plea of not guilty. The D.A.'s man, a third assistant for such a small case, reduced his charge to use and possession. Calhoun asked for time to consider his plea to the reduced charge. The judge bound the hearing over until the afternoon when Calhoun would plead his man, and it was over.

Shayne watched the man with the black case. Calhoun and his client walked toward the rear door where an officer waited to take Reed back to jail until the afternoon.

Calhoun walked out the rear.

The man with the black box didn't make a move. Reed stood with the officer at rear ready to go out when the papers were completed.

Suddenly, Shayne saw it! A hunch. A wild, sudden hunch that something was very wrong.

The redhead hurried out of the courtroom.

XVII

THE ROOF OF the building faced the rear of the courthouse. A six story building, with a tarred roof hot in the sun, and many jutting ventilators and skylights and entrances to the building below.

Somewhere a noon whistle blew in the sun of the city.

On the roof nothing moved.

In the narrow space beside the courthouse policemen walked. At exactly 12:02 P.M. John Calhoun stepped out into the side area, and turned away toward the street at the front of the courthouse. He walked stiffly, slowly. His back was turned to the six-story roof where, suddenly, a man seemed to rise up out of the roof itself.

A man with a rifle.

At the same moment, Wallace Reed came out of the courthouse and turned toward the rear street where the police wagon waited to return him briefly to jail.

The man with the rifle moved low to the front parapet of the building. A thin smile played across his face as he saw Calhoun still walking slowly away from him, and the police watching the lawyer.

The man knelt at the parapet, rested his rifle on the edge, adjusted the telescopic sight.

Wallace Reed had reached the rear street now, walking three steps

in front of the policeman with him. As Reed reached the street, he began to turn toward the wagon, and in that moment was moving parallel to the sniper in exact range.

"Hold it, Gradell!"

Shayne came out of the exit to the roof, his automatic drawn.

The sniper whirled.

For a split second Andy Gradell and Shayne faced each other. Then the sniper fired his rifle from the hip.

Shayne went over in a dive, his own shot chipping the parapet.

Gradell hurled the rifle at the detective. It hit Shayne as he ducked aside. In the moment gained, Gradell made the first exit down from the roof. He half slid, half fell down the ladder inside the building and ran wildly down the stairs toward the street. Shayne was after him.

The two men pounded down, Gradell a floor ahead, his pistol out now.

"You're finished, Gradell!" Shayne shouted.

For answer the sniper-gunner shot upwards at the shadows of the stairs. The bullets whined and echoed in what was a silent, warehouse-loft building. Shayne fired back, missing.

Gradell reached the ground floor first, and looked around. No one was in sight. Behind him Shayne came down closer. Gradell had no choice—Shayne would see him in the open before he saw Shayne

clear. The gunman ran out into the sun.

The street was deserted.

Gradell raced for a small gray car parked a few feet away, jumped in, and drove off.

Shayne came out of the building as the gray car vanished. He stood looking after it, and then walked slowly for his own car parked only a few more feet up the silent street.

Fifteen minutes after he had escaped from the warehouse, Andy Gradell pulled to a skidding halt in front of a quiet house in a middle-class area of Miami. The gunman jumped out and ran up to the house.

Gradell burst in through the door. Mrs. Wallace Reed stood up, her hand covering her mouth.

"Is he—" she whispered.

"A trap!" Gradell said, cursed. "That damned Shayne had me staked on that roof. I was lucky to get away, Obie!"

The man who had been sitting with Mrs. Wallace Reed on the couch in the living room of the quiet house didn't move. He was a man of medium height, medium build, somewhere between forty-five and fifty, but in good shape, looking younger. Well cared for. His smooth, dark face was immobile, the eyes all surface like the cold eyes of a walking dead man. Nothing moved behind those eyes. A silent, smooth man in a five-hundred dollar suit.

Obie Samson just sat for a long ten seconds. When he spoke his



voice was liquid, like molten steel. "Lucky to get away, Andy? How did you get away? Where were the cops?"

"I don't know, Obie! Only that Mike Shayne was there. How the hell did he figure we'd switch to killing the punk?"

"He's smart, Obie. I told you he was smart. Too smart to lose you when he had you cornered on a roof, Andy."

"What?" Gradell said. "What?"

"You made a mistake, Andy. We both did, but you made the last mistake. You came here!" Obie Samson said, still smooth, still quiet, but his dark eyes snapping now. "They let you come here, Andy."

"Let me? Hell no! No one followed me! I watched. Shayne didn't even come out before I was long gone."

"So?" Samson said, considered. "Then maybe I have some time.

They haven't anything on me, Andy, see? Nothing. Unless you talked — and you'd never talk, would you?"

"Talk? You know better, Obie!"

"No, you wouldn't talk, but you would be stupid. They had no way of getting to me, unless you led them here! Now you're here. Now they can prove I hired you. They take us both, and then you will talk."

"Here? What the hell does it matter? I tell you no one could of followed me!" Gradell cried.

"No?" Obie Samson said. "Listen."

The three of them fell silent and listened. Out in the street a car drove past and stopped.

Another car stopped up the street.

Gradell turned, looked at Obie Samson. "But —"

"Shayne is smart, Andy, I told you. They must have bugged your car, or had a chopper watching you from upstairs. They let you get away, Andy. And you took it like the fish you are."

Gradell looked wildly all around. "We gotta get out!"

"I'll get out, Andy. Not you."

A pistol appeared in Obie Samson's hand. He shot once, twice.

Andy Gradell, shot dead center at fifteen feet, fell dead on his face. Mrs. Reed opened her mouth to scream.

"Quiet!" Obie Samson said. "Let's go, my dear."

XVIII

MIKE SHAYNE sat in his car and watched the quiet house. He had been first on the scene, the helicopter wheeling away above and to the west. Gradell's car sat out front. There was no sign of any other car.

Had he been wrong?

No, Gradell was a stranger in town. He had gotten away. He wasn't a brain. He would have run to the only man he knew to help him — Obie Samson.

But where was Samson?

Bellows arrived within a few minutes, and two more squad cars. Shayne saw Bellows watching him — still not sure of this, going only on Shayne's hunch that this was the only way they'd ever nail Obie Samson for the extortion.

The shots rang in the street like blows in Shayne's face.

Two shots — from inside the quiet house.

Bellows was out of his car, gun drawn, and running across the lawn in the sun, his men converging around him, some heading fast for the rear of the house.

Shayne was out.

Then the redhead stopped, frozen in the sun. His gray eyes narrowed, his brain working furiously. Samson had shot — it could only be Samson, not Gradell. With the police already outside. Gradell had arrived, on the run, escaped from a trap, and Samson had not come out.

Shayne got back into his car, gunned the engine, and tore off and around the quiet block. His gray eyes searched the street behind the house. He saw nothing.

He drove along the street behind the house, slowly, watching each house, each garage, and he saw what he was looking for. In the garage of the house directly behind the house where Gradell had run inside was a long, black limousine.

As Shayne saw it, the limousine roared up and jumped out of the garage. Bellows's men came running through from the other block. The limousine reached the street, screamed its tires in agony as it made its turn.

Shayne held his automatic in both hands and fired — one, twice, three times.

The right front tire of the limousine exploded with a puff of dust.

The big, black care slewed down the street, careening right and left, and smashed head on into a brick wall. Shayne heard the shattering of glass and steel sixty feet behind.

He was out and running.

Bellows's men were running, with Bellows yelling orders from the rear.

A man staggered out of the front seat of the limousine. Johnny Mack, gun in hand, shooting even as he staggered up the street, his face a mass of blood. The short gunman came on shooting, blind and unaware of the police converging all around.

Mack went down on his face, still trying to raise up and protect his boss. A policeman kicked the gun from his hand.

Shayne wasn't looking at Johnny Mack.

Obie Samson was out of the car, untouched, his five-hundred dollar suit not even dusty. The smooth boss held a gun, and backed slowly toward where a car stood on the street.

Samson held Mrs. Wallace Reed in front of him.

"Please!" the little wife cried. "Please! Don't shoot!"

Obie Samson said nothing, his glittering dark eyes watching them all, his pistol steady.

"Please! He—"

Samson said, quietly, "You'll have to hit the little lady. I don't think you want to do that, any of you. Now I want to get this car here, and—"

Mrs. Reed had cowered low, crying out still, and suddenly she buried her teeth in Obie Samson's gun arm. Sansom howled, swore, let go of the woman to keep his gun steady.

She dropped face down, sprawled with her dress half up her back.

Obie Samson looked down, his gun turning down to her back. Shayne yelled: "Samson!"

Obie Samson just stood there a second, then he gave the faintest of shrugs, dropped his pistol raised his hands over his smooth head. He raised the hands lazily, easily, like

a man who still knows he will somehow find a way out—later. A man who lives to fight another day.

Bellows handcuffed the boss racketeer.

Shayne picked the pistol up, carefully, by the barrel.

Obie Samson sighed and looked at Mrs. Wallace Reed, where she was still sitting on the ground. "I knew a woman would get me someday. I never could leave the women alone. A nice little bird that, Shayne. Real nice."

It was dark when Mike Shayne finished his statement in the office of Will Gentry.

"What's our chances, Will?" he asked.

Gentry scowled. "On Samson? Best we ever had. If we don't get him for killing Gradell, which we will, we can get him on the extortion, attempted murder, or all of them. He'll get the best lawyers, but with the woman to talk against him, we'll get him this time."

"They'll try self-defense on Gradell, a known killer."

"They will, but I don't think it'll work this time."

"He was right; women ruined him at last. What happens to her?"

"We'll have to make a deal, to get her testimony against Samson, but she'll take a conspiracy rap. She's got a good lawyer."

"Who?"

"Calhoun," Gentry said, and laughed. "Her ever-loving husband, Mr. Wallace Reed, begged him.

He's a good lawyer; he believes in the law. But even he won't get her off."

"And all she wanted was the good life."

"We all do, but not that way," Gentry said.

Shayne had nothing more to say. He walked out, tired and hungry. Wallace Reed sat alone in the outer office. Free now, the drug charge an obvious frame.

The young man looked up and

tried to smile, but his eyes betrayed him. Reed looked down again.

A free man, alive when he could have been dead, but not a happy man. He had loved a woman who would have seen him dead to have the 'good' life. Wallace Reed was not going to be a happy man for a long time.

Mike Shayne went on out, breathing the night air in the street, knowing that at least a man could trust the night air.



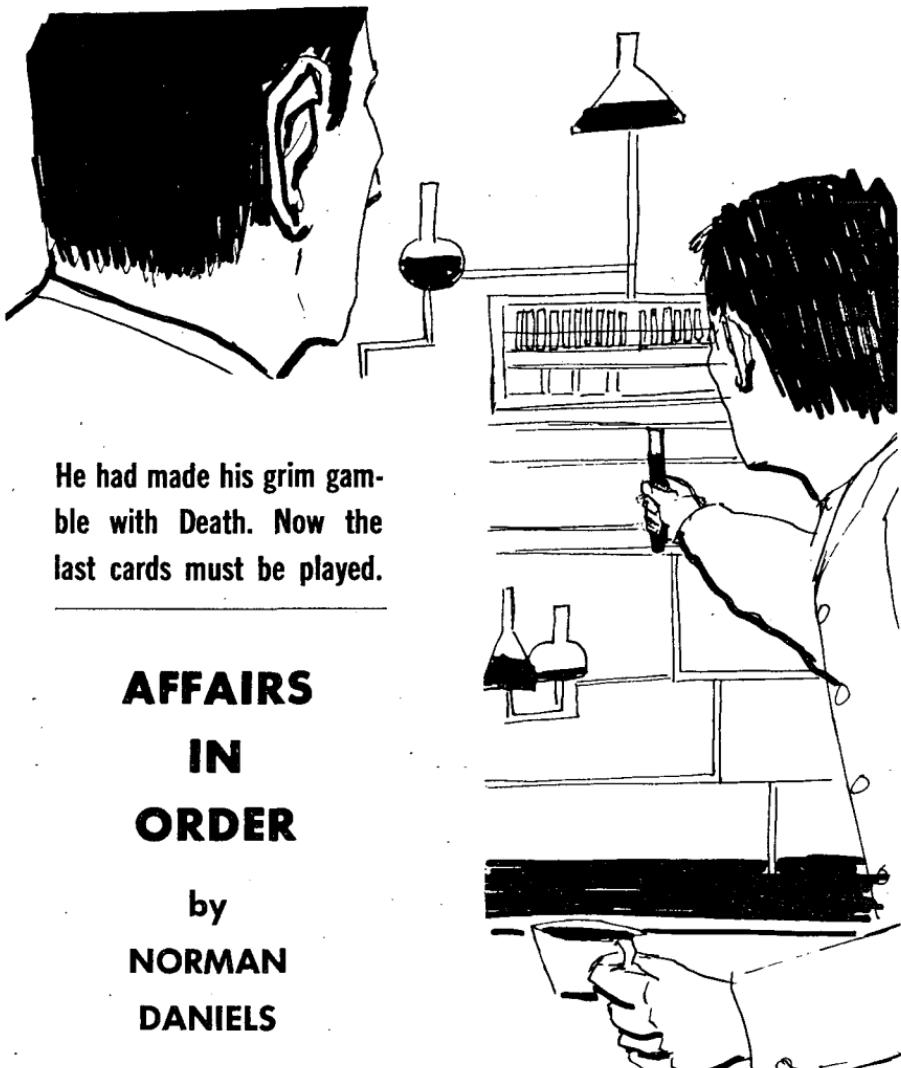
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REX CARTER was hunched over in his chair. He was a sturdy man, well-muscled, thick of neck with a broad face surmounted by great beetling black eyebrows. "The



reason I asked you here," he said, "is to tell you that I may be going to die."

His audience consisted of his wife, Phyllis, who sat beside the guest, Hal Damon, on the yellow divan. Phyllis was young, lovely, but her eyes were frightened and shimmering with apprehension.

Hal Damon was much closer to her age than her husband and he was also much handsomer. The only thing the two men had in common was the fact that both were scientists. Rex Carter, a manufacturing pharmaceutical chemist and Hal Damon, a medical doctor.

"If I heard you correctly," Damon said, "you said you may be going to die."

"That's right. I'm not sure. I know my chances. They are exactly fifty-fifty."

"Rex," Phyllis said, "if this is just another cruel joke on your part—"

"I assure you, my charming wife, it is no joke. I came home from Peru as fast as a jet could take me because if I am going to die, I wish all my affairs in order. Therefore, it's necessary for me to tell you what has happened to me."

"If you are in danger of dying, you should consult a doctor," Phyllis said.

"But not me, Mr. Carter." Damon managed a tight smile. "For obvious reasons, wouldn't you say?"

Rex Carter permitted himself a

small laugh. "Indeed, I would say so. So please listen to me now. I left for Peru a month ago with several of my best chemists. We were looking for a certain plant, rare even in Peru and which grows nowhere else. It's a relative of the Snakeroot plant from which we get Rauwolfia, but it is extremly poisonous, even in very small quantities. It gives no symptoms until a few seconds prior to death, it requires about forty-eight hours to take effect and there is no antidote."

"Are you telling us that you took some of that poison?" Damon asked.

"I may have. It happened quite simply and became complicated by only one unforeseen circumstance. One of my chemists, George Reynard by name, was doing experimental work in our makeshift laboratory with the extract of the drug. He very carelessly used a common coffee cup to hold some of the drug. There were two identical cups. I drank coffee from one of them, George used the other. We know beyond any doubt that one cup contained enough of the poison to kill quickly, after it takes effect."

"Why not submit to an examination?" Dr. Damon inquired.

Carter regarded him with a mixture of tolerance and contempt. "There is no test, no way of finding out if a person has taken any of the stuff. I told you, this is a new drug. We know little about it, ex-

cept concerning its delayed and very toxic reaction."

"If you drank from the poisoned cup you will die?" Phyllis asked. Her concern was genuine, though she had long since ceased to care for him.

"Yes — tonight!"

"And if you do not die, then this George Reynard will?" Dr. Damon asked.

"Obviously, wouldn't you say?"

"Rex, there is no need to be sarcastic."

"I relish being sarcastic. I believe I have reason to be. As for the situation I find myself in — George was responsible for the poison getting into one of the cups — an instance of his extreme carelessness. It bothered him so much he took one of our jeeps and rode away in it. I don't know what motive was behind the assinine act. Perhaps he wants to die in the jungle, if he's the one who is to die. Or if I am, he didn't want to be around when it happened."

"How will you know?" Phyllis asked.

Carter shook his head exasperatedly. "I may not. But you will, for I shall be lying dead, my dear."

"Why did you come back?" Hal Damon asked pointblank.

"I told you, Doctor to put my affairs in order."

"We'll leave you then," Phyllis said. "You will wish to conduct this business alone."

"No, my dear. Stay right where



you are." Rex Carter reached into his coat pocket and brought out a snub-nosed revolver. He fondled it like an old friend. "I thought of killing myself, but then that would be silly because I don't know for certain if I am about to die. Then I thought of killing you two. In the first flush of excitement and fear after I learned I might be poisoned, I immediately thought of killing both of you."

"He's indulging in more of this exquisite torture of his," Damon told Phyllis. "He's not going to use the gun."

Carter casually aimed the gun at Phyllis, who sat bolt upright. Her hands, clasped in her lap, began to

tremble. Hal merely crossed his legs and leaned back against the divan.

"You're not afraid?" Carter asked him conversationally.

"Not in the least. You won't use that gun on either of us, for the very same reason you're going to die and if you don't, it might be quite embarrassing to have a couple of dead people on your hands."

Rex Carter laughed and opened a drawer in the table next to where he sat. He tossed the gun into it and slammed it shut.

"I may have misjudged you somewhat, Doctor. However, I can assure you I will not misjudge Phyllis."

"Please tell us what you want," Phyllis cried out. "Rex, I don't want you to die!"

"Why not?" Carter was enjoying himself, laughing at both of them. He certainly didn't show any fear for his life. With the odds exactly even, that made him a rather brave man. Hal Damon admitted that to himself, but he thought he detested Rex Carter like no other man he had ever known.

"Rex, I am your wife."

"I can't seem to recall the last time we acted like man and wife, my dear."

"Still, I am married to you."

"But never loved me."

"I — couldn't help that."

"You are in love with the good doctor here."

"Yes."

"He is younger, handsomer and,

of great importance to you, kinder and compassionate."

She closed her eyes tightly in resignation of more of this cruel verbal sparring Rex was so good at and enjoyed so much.

"I have had no affair with Hal," she said, trying to be patient. "I am your wife. So long as that condition exists, I shall do nothing to embarrass you. But I don't want any more of this bickering. Not now. Please!"

"Don't you realize you may be dead tomorrow?" Hal Damon asked.

"I realize it very much," Carter said. "So now I will get at the motive which sent me home as fast as I could get here. I am not going to make any attempt to disinherit you, Phyllis. It would only result in a legal battle, during which the lawyer would get much of it. If I die, it shall be as a wealthy man so you will never have any need to worry."

Phyllis arose abruptly. "I've had all of this I can take."

"Sit down," Carter said sharply. "I am merely trying to tell you what to expect if I die. Sit down, I say!"

As always, she obeyed him, but when Hal Damon reached over to hold her hand reassuringly, she didn't draw hers away. Without him, she thought, she would have died too.

Rex Carter removed one of his pale, thin cigars from a humidor at his elbow, prepared it elaborately,

drawing out each step. When he had it going to his satisfaction, he leaned back like a man about to conclude an ordinary business deal.

"My dear, does the doctor know about us? I mean — our relationship as to gratitudes and debts?"

She nodded, unable to speak any more.

"That's fine. It won't be necessary to go into all manner of explanations. In short, Doctor, you will not marry my widow. Or do you think you will?"

"She is not a widow, sir."

"Ah, but if she is one tomorrow. What about that?"

"That would seem to be pretty much out of your control then."

"Now we're getting somewhere. The fact is, Doctor, it won't be out of my control. Living or dead, Phyllis is my wife and she shall not be anyone else's. I'll tell you exactly why. When I found Phyllis and fell in love with her, she was nobody. She was under a most exacting strain as well. Both her father and mother were terminal cancer cases. Both would soon be in need of expert care to make their days, easier, but all of this was quite beyond Phyllis. I stepped in. My money and the best care possible for both of them, kept them alive and comparatively comfortable for three years. I was responsible for that. Do you understand, Doctor?"

"You've made it plain enough," Hal Damon said.

"Phyllis married me, partly out

of gratitude, I suppose, and she gave me her solemn word that she would always be my wife, for there was nothing more she could do to repay my kindness to her parents."

"I don't see why she still believes that," Damon said sharply. "You've just told her this generosity of yours was selfishly motivated."

"Oh, it was. But Phyllis is the kind of girl who doesn't break a promise. Even though I may be dead tomorrow, she will not marry again if I ask her not to. Isn't that true, Phyllis?"

Phyllis nodded slowly, not looking at Hal Damon, breaking her heart with every nod.

"If I live, she will always be my wife. If I die, she will go on being true to my memory. Those were the terms we set forth and agreed to. I now believe my affairs are quite in order."

"You're a monster," Dr. Damon said. "I'll do everything I can to take Phyllis away from you, alive or dead. Preferably alive, so you will know she isn't to be dominated by you forever."

Rex Carter arose slowly, carefully placed his cigar on an ash tray and walked toward the living room door. There he paused and looked at the beautiful room, as if for the last time. His face was emotionless, but his eyes scanned all those things he had acquired and grown accustomed to.

They were his — the hundred year old chest, polished like a mir-

ror, the huge piano, the chairs covered with petit point, handmade a century ago. The rug was an antique from Kashmir. The wall hangings were works of art, masterpieces. This room, the entire house, was an example of Rex Carter's fine taste and his obsession for possessing material things.

He placed a wife in the same category. Someone beautiful, properly bought, to be his property forever. He turned abruptly, walked out of the room and headed for the staircase to the second floor. Just before he went up the stairs he hesitated.

Hal Damon and Phyllis had both arisen, their attention focused on Rex Carter.

His eyes seemed to mock them as he said, "Phyllis, I would like you to come up presently."

"Yes, Rex," she said.

"And I will now say good night to our good doctor. Perhaps it's good-by, eh, Doctor? Wouldn't you like that."

Hal Damon remained silent, but after Rex Carter disappeared up the stairs, he sat down again.

"Phyllis, you've seen and heard him now, as he really is. Whether he lives or dies, you can't stay with him, or his memory. You're going to come with me. Whatever he did for your parents, you've more than repaid him for. You owe him nothing."

She didn't go to him. She stood there and shook her head. "No, Hal.

I have no way of repaying him. I am in his debt now and I shall always be. He was kind — gentle and kind and so generous — when my father and mother needed all of that so much. He hasn't been cruel to me, ever. Possessive, but not cruel."

"What do you think he is now? Torturing you this way."

"He's under a horrible strain. He doesn't know what he's saying."

Hal Damon sighed and arose. She ran to him and threw her arms around him.

"Please don't go, darling. Tonight it might be — awful —"

He patted her shoulder. "Of course. Forgive me. I wasn't thinking properly. I'll stay as long as you need me. I won't talk of how much I love you and want you. I won't comment again on the nature of man your husband is. I'll remain, as a doctor. Ready and willing to do what I can for him."

"Thank you." She looked up at him, still in his arms. "I love you, Hal. But Rex is right. I owe him too much to walk out on him or, as you say, his memory. I thought about it a hundred times. If I could have gone to him and told him of something I did for him, which was as kind and generous as what he did for my parents, than I could have said we were even, all debts paid. I could have left him then. But I am deeply in Rex's debt. And I shall be, as long as I live."

"I understand."

"I'll go to him now. Please wait for me, Hal. If he is the one who's been poisoned, I'm going to need you."

"I'll be here," he said, and watched her walk with that enchanting grace and erect carriage he admired in her. She looked back and tried to smile. It was a pathetic gesture.

Then she climbed the stairs and went to the bedroom suite where Rex was waiting, disrobed to his waist. The room was dark and when she entered, he came to her with a low, heart-rending moan and put his arms around her.

"I don't want to die. I want to live. Live, Phyllis, and I'm scared. I'm so frightened."

She put her arms around him. "Rex, the poison would have shown some effects by now. You didn't get it."

"No, there's no reaction. Won't be until two or three o'clock in the morning. I thought I could lie down and go to sleep and if I were to die, it would be then. But I can't sleep. I'm too scared."

"You don't even know for certain you took the poison, Rex. You have so much hope. And it may not be as deadly as you think, even if you do have it. You must believe that."

He dabbed at his eyes, grateful for the darkness because he was not a man who cried easily. "I'm a scientist. I know poisons. I know this one, I discovered it. I know exactly



what it will do and how it acts. If it was in my cup, I am a dead man. I shall never see another day, another sun." His voice broke. "I'm not ready for that. I can't bear it."

She led him over to the bed and drew him down to sit beside her. "This other man — the one who may have taken the poison — can't they find him?"

"They're trying. They're to send a cable the moment they do. He used his cup some time before I used mine. There would be a three-hour difference. He would die first — he would be dead now — if he was poisoned. That's what I'm waiting for, the cable. Perhaps a phone call, if they can find one down there.

I doubt it. Phyllis, stay with me. Don't leave me—please. I know how selfish I am, but that's my way. I don't mean to be cruel.

"If I die, you'll be wealthy, taken care of for the rest of your life. You'll live here in my home. It will be like part of me left behind to enjoy the material things I've bought. That's what I want. That's why I never want you to marry again."

"I will not marry again," she said. "There is no way I can ever repay what you did for me. If being true to you, or your memory, is all I can do, then I shall never betray you."

"I—I'm very tired—"

She looked at him quickly, nervously.

"No, it's not that. The poison won't work for some hours. But I haven't slept. I'm so tired—"

"Try to sleep then," she urged. "I'll stay here."

He lay back against the pillows. "I can't sleep. It's utterly impossible. All I can think of is that I may die tonight—soon—"

"It will be a wonderful morning for you if you are free of the poison. Try to think of that."

"I've tried. How I've tried! But all I can think of is that it *may* be a wonderful morning and it *may* never be dawn for me again. I can't take this, Phyllis. It's horrible to contemplate, to be unsure, not to know."

She touched his moist forehead

and tried to soothe him to sleep, but it was no use. She sat there for two hours while he lay staring with wide-open eyes into the darkness and seeing only death. For her, time was endless. For him, it was a flash.

He sat up with a gasp of horror when the door chimes sounded downstairs.

"The cable," he said. "It must be the cable."

"I'll get it. The news will be good, Rex. It has to be good. You'll see."

He clung to her hand, holding her back, but finally he let go and lay back in the agony of the last moments before he knew the truth. Phyllis hurried downstairs. Hal Damon stood there with the cable in his hand. She took one long breath and accepted the envelope. Then she turned and walked very slowly up the first of the stairs while she slit the seal with her nail and removed the two pages comprising the cable. As she read them, her ascent became slower and slower. Then she cried out and began to run.

She turned on the light in the bedroom. Rex sat up, blinding his reddened eyes. He suddenly looked a thousand years old to her.

"Rex, he's dead. The other man is dead. Let me read this. 'After prolonged search of jungle, George was located. We are sorry to report that he was dead. Further details will follow . . .'"

"Give me that," Carter cried. "Give it to me, Phyllis."

He read the page quickly. Then he sank back against the pillows again. "George is dead. I am alive. Now I can sleep. Now I can let myself drift into blissful, wonderful sleep—"

His eyes closed as he spoke and before Phyllis turned out the light, he was sound asleep. She covered him with half the spread and she bent down and kissed him lightly on the forehead. It was still damp and she fetched a cold cloth and wiped away the sweat and then dried his face.

She backed out of the room, finally, closed the door very quietly, and went downstairs. Hal was at the door, hat in hand.

"You don't need me now," he said. "I guess I'm glad for him. I could hear him down here. He was frightened."

She took his hat away from him and placed it back on one of the reception hall chairs. Then she led him into the living room and put out all but one table lamp.

"I need you, darling," she said. "I shall always need you."

"Yes," he replied simply.

"You don't understand. I owe Rex nothing now. I repaid him for all he did for me and mine. I gave him what he gave my parents. I gave him peace of mind, comfort and sleep."

He looked at her sharply. "But the cable—"

"I read the first page to Rex. It ended on the information that they had found George. The rest of it was on the second page. George had not died of the poison. He had waited until he was sure he had not taken it and then—he shot himself. I let Rex read only the part that stated George was dead, not how he died or why."

"Then Rex is poisoned. He will die."

"There is nothing we can do," she said softly. "No way of saving him. He said so himself. I am no longer beholden to him. He will die in his sleep, without pain, without worry. That I did for him and I wiped out my debt."

Hal Damon put his arm around her, drew her to him comforting her. While they waited . . . and Rex Carter slept . . .



The ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every month.

YOU CAN NEVER REALLY KNOW

Two roads stretched before me in the night. One led to safety, the other to a very messy death. I had to take one of them — now. And the only man who could tell me the right road was dead!

by BILL PRONZINI

AT FIRST, there was the heat and the glare of the tropical sunlight pressing against my closed eyelids. Then there was pain, like the heavy pounding of surf, in my temples and back of my forehead. Finally, after a long time, there was a sharp, insistent ringing sound that could only be a telephone.

I turned my head a little, unleashing a new wash of pain, and my cheek touched the stiff, woven fibers of a rug.

I got my eyes open. It took a moment for my vision to clear, but when it did I saw that the sunlight was coming through a closed set of french doors near where I lay. Beyond the doors was a patio and a lush garden of jungle ferns and red jasmine and chamadora palms.

Carefully, I rolled my head again and looked up at a tile ceiling. I lay that way for a moment, listening

to the ringing of the telephone; then I put my hands flat on the rug and raised myself into a sitting position. Nausea climbed into my throat. I waited for it to pass before lifting my head. I let my eyes circuit the room.

The walls were inlaid, alternate-grained panels of Philippine mahogany, lined with bookshelves on three sides and expensive-looking Javanese wood carvings on the fourth. There was a mahogany desk near me and a leather settee and several rattan chairs. The rug was Thai-crafted and intricately-patterned.

I had never seen any of it before.

I ran my tongue over dry lips. The taste of gin pahits and stale cigarettes was harsh and caustic in my mouth. Where was I? How had —

The mental effort made the pain



more acute. Vague images floated near the surface of my memory, but when I tried to grasp them they retreated into a black void. I could not remember anything at all.

I managed to get on my feet. I stood unsteadily, squeezing my eyes tightly shut against the rush of blood

that seemed to explode inside my head. When it subsided, I realized that the telephone was still jangling.

I went over there, slowly and automatically, and put out my hand for it. Just as my fingers touched the receiver it went silent.

I said something in a soft voice

and started to turn away — and that was when I saw him.

He lay on his back behind the desk, his gray eyes open and staring sightlessly at the ceiling. He was dressed in a fawn-colored dressing gown with Oriental designs on it, and the gown's front and the rug beneath his body were saturated with blood. The white-bone-handled Chinese dagger that had been used to cut his throat lay near his outstretched right arm.

His name was Philip Ormsby, and up until six o'clock last night he had been my employer at Ormsby and Sidemark, Ltd., a Singapore import-export company.

I stood motionless for a long moment, the nausea rising in my throat again, and in that moment some of it came rushing back to me.

I remembered Ormsby's office, the words we had had—harsh and violent — over his mistreatment of two poor and half-starved coolie laborers he had found stealing a block of cheese. I remembered him firing me, flat out, and the useless anger inside me when I left him. I remembered the damned fool need to get drunk, and some of the places I had gone to take care of that with gin pahits I had never liked — the Seaman's Bar on South Bridge Road, and The Malaysian Gardens on Jalan Barat, and the Old Cathay on Betar Road, and certainly a good many others.

That was all. The rest of it was lost.

I felt the first stirrings of panic. Not because I thought I had killed Ormsby — a man knows what he is or is not capable of under certain circumstances—but because I knew how it would look to the *polis*. Even though it had been two years since the DC-3 cargoed with contraband silk that I had been piloting had crashed on the Island of Penang and killed my partner and best friend, I did not have much of a reputation with the authorities.

I had been a thorn in their side for some time before the accident; they were aware I was involved in black market smuggling from under the guise of Connell and Falco Transport, the air freight company Pete Falco and I operated, but they had been unable to prove it.

Since the contraband silk had been burned beyond recognition in the crash, they still had had too little evidence to convict me, although enough to have my commercial freight license revoked. I had not been up in a plane since that time — I would not have flown even if they had let me keep the license — and I had had no dealings outside the law; but in the opinion of the authorities once a suspect always a suspect.

I was in a bad spot. I knew I would be implicated in Ormsby's death because of the argument we had had the previous evening. There were three witnesses to the verbal exchange—Evan Sidemark, Ormby's partner; Misha Jung, his

ecretary; and Kim Tat Puteh, the Malay warehouse foreman — and they would no doubt inform the *polis* of it. Too, the barmen in the avens I had been in would, upon questioning, state that I had visited each and left carrying a progressively larger load.

From there, it would be simple enough in the minds of the constabulary; In more or less of a stupor, I had come here to Ormsby's home, to renew our argument. There had been more violent words, I had lost my head.

I knew I had to get out of there as quickly and as unobtrusively as possible; it would put a blue ribbon on their suspicions if I were found with the body or seen leaving the premises.

I went out through the french doors into the patio and stood for a moment in the sweltering heat, listening to spotted *munias* sing in the pastoral brightness. The garden was enclosed by a vine-covered brick wall, some eight feet high.

I hurried there, stepping through the jungle-like growth and across a short, very green lawn. Off on my right, set into the wall, was an iron-framed wooden gate; it was locked with an iron drawbolt from the inside.

I threw the bolt and opened the gate a little and looked out. Tangan, all right. The wide macadam road shimmered with pools of heat, and the stately royal palms that

lined it were motionless in the still morning.

I did not see anyone in the well-landscaped yards of the villas and colonials facing me. The road seemed void of pedestrian or vehicle traffic as well. I stepped through, eased the gate shut, and walked rapidly away.

After two blocks I began to breathe a little easier. A taxicab came along in the middle of the third and I waved it down. The driver was a pudgy Tamil with a very white smile.

"Where is it you wish to go on this fine day, *tuan?*" he asked me.

That was a good question. Just where did I want to go? Mu bush jacket and khaki trousers were rumpled and sodden, and I had only twelve Straits dollars left in my wallet. Since Ormsby's body has not as yet been discovered, I decided it would be safe enough to go back to my flat; nobody would be looking for me yet. I told the Tamil to take me to Punyang Street, in Chinatown.

When he turned onto Orchard Road, leading southeast into the city proper, I leaned back on the sweating upholstery and did some thinking. I did not care at all for the conclusions I began to draw.

If I hadn't gone to Ormsby's home of my own volition last night — and I was as certain as I could be that I had not — then that meant somebody had to have taken me there. The reason was obvious

enough: a nice, neat little frame. The reason whoever it was had picked me was also obvious enough. He—or she—had known about my argument with Ormsby. That narrowed the list down to three, I thought.

Evan Sidemark.

Kim Tat Puteh.

Misha Jung.

One of them, it seemed logical to surmise, had killed Ormsby. He was a loud, vulgar, conscienceless man with the knack for evoking instant dislike the first time you met him. He was also an unscrupulous dealer who I knew for a fact had crossed the thin line between legality and illegality a time or two in the past; and if I had not needed a job very badly two months ago, I do not think I would have gone to work for him in any capacity, much less as a freight handler. But even with all of this, I had no idea which of the three people had hated him enough to want him dead.

Sidemark, for example, was a reasonably decent sort, amiable, Oxford-educated, brilliant with figures and in the internal machinations of the import-export business.

It seemed to me that he and Ormsby got along as well as two completely opposite personalities could. The idea of him cutting his partner's throat was almost ludicrous.

Kim Tat was an expressionless, sharp-featured Malay who said little and accepted Ormsby's constant

belittling with Asian stoicism. He knew everything that went on at the warehouse end of the company and he did his job efficiently and without complaint. It was impossible to tell his true feelings about Ormsby, but I had gotten the impression that he was a gentle man by nature. I could not envision him a killer.

There was some talk that Misha Jung had been Ormsby's mistress, but their attitude toward one another, as far as I was able to discern, was strictly businesslike.

Like Kim Tat, she never became ruffled when Ormsby went off into one of his tirades. She was a tall, strong-looking Straits Chinese, but if the mental image of the two men performing such a cold, dispassionate job on Ormsby was ridiculous, then that went double for Misha Jung.

None of them, then, had a surface motive for wanting Ormsby dead or seemed capable of committing the murder. But unless I was very far off base, one of them had killed him.

When the Tamil let me off at my flat, I went upstairs and had a quick shower, took four aspirins and changed my clothes; I found twenty Straits dollars in the dresser and put that in my wallet. On the street twenty minutes later, I began to walk toward the Singapore River and the Old Cathay on Betar Road.

I did not know how long I had before Ormsby's body was discovered, but since he had been a

bachelor living alone and since it was Sunday, time was in my favor.

I did not hold much hope in the idea—the killer would have realized the risk of both asking for me and being seen with me, and would likely have avoided either, but it was worth the effort nonetheless.

I went to the Old Cathay, the last place I remembered being in, and got the name of the night barman from the day barman on duty and looked him up. He recalled my presence, around midnight, and that I had been most drunk. But he said I had left alone and that I had spoken to no one of his recollection. No, there had been no one asking for me and no, he hadn't any idea where I had gone after leaving the Old Cathay.

I tried several other places, including the Seaman's Bar and The Malaysian Gardens, in the chance that I had gone back to one or the other, but the only useful thing I learned was that I had been in The Lair on Lavender Street around one. I had only stayed for a single gin pahit, however, proclaiming then that I was going home. I had left alone.

It was useless pursuing it any further. Sometime and somewhere between Lavender Street and my flat in Chinatown, I had been picked up and taken to Ormsby's. But where or by whom I did not know. I could not even remember having



been in The Lair, much less anything that occurred afterward.

I hailed another taxi, this one driven by a young Chinese. Being Sunday, Ormsby and Sidemark, Ltd. would be closed. Like as not I would find Sidemark and Kim Tat and Misha Jung at their respective homes. I knew that Misha lived in the Katong Bahru Housing Estate between Geylang and East Coast Roads; that was the closest address and I decided to go there first.

Her building was less than ten years old, part of Singapore's extensive program to provide adequate housing for its ever-increasing population. It was constructed of bricks and hollow cement blocks, faced with granite and capped with a red-tile roof. Each unit—small, in the low rent bracket, and self-contained—had its own private grillwork bal-

cony. Misha lived on the third floor, rear

I went up winding stone-and-cement steps inside to the third floor, found apartment 34 which the row of mailboxes in the foyer had told me was Misha Jung's, and rapped on the door. There was the sound of footsteps inside, and after a moment it opened.

She was a handsome woman, in her early thirties. Her ebony hair was piled high on her head and fastened with a jeweled comb. She wore a short housecoat that did little to conceal a figure more buxom and more lushly-curved than most Chinese women. Her eyes, almond-shaped and colored, widened as she recognized me, but I could detect neither anxiety nor fear in them.

"Dan Connell," she said. Her tone was one of puzzlement.

"I'd like to talk to you for a moment, Misha, if you don't mind."

"Why—of course, not at all."

She stepped aside to allow me to enter. The apartment was tiny. The sitting room which we were in had a bright-designed linoleum floor, a blue and white ersatz leather settee with matching chair, a single vynl-topped end table that had a polished Chinese wood sculpture on it, and a metal legged half table set into a wall niche. But it was clean and neat and smelled pleasantly of sandalwood.

Misha indicated the settee. "Please sit down, Dan."

I sat on one end of it. Misha seated herself on the chair and tugged the housecoat down on her knee. She regarded me quizzically.

"What may I do for?" she asked.

I could see no point in being gentle or indirect. I said bluntly, "Ormsby's dead, Misha. Somebody used a Chinese dagger on him last night."

Her body went rigid. Her eyes open wide and staring in my direction, but she was not seeing me at all now. After a very long time, she said softly, "How—how do you know this?"

"I know it, that's all."

"There can be no mistake?"

"There's no mistake."

"Where did it happen?"

"His home in Tanglin."

"A thief?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Who else would wish to kill Philip?"

"That's a good question," I said. "The *polis* will try to tie it to me, because of that argument we had in his office yesterday, and I'm not going to sit still for it."

She was silent for a moment. When she spoke again, it was almost as if she were talking to herself. "He was a good man, in spite of his shortcomings. He could be generous and kind and very gentle when he wished to be."

"Sure," I said. Maybe there was something to that talk about their relationship after all. "Listen, Misha,

I want to know what happened after I left last night."

She moistened her lips, and her eyes seemed to focus on me again. "What happened?"

"That's right. What did you and Ormsby and Kim Tat and Sidemark do?"

"Kim and Mr. Sidemark departed almost immediately."

"Together?"

"No," she said. "I don't think so."

"Do you know where either of them went?"

"Mr. Sidemark was expecting guests for dinner," Misha said. Her voice was toneless, almost mesmeric. "His home is in Johore Bahru, and he mentioned that he must hurry so as not to be late."

"And Kim Tat?"

"He did not confide his destination."

"What about you and Ormsby?"

Her eyes took on that blank stare again. "We remained in his office for a time."

"Then what?"

"I came here and prepared my supper."

"Ormsby was still in his office?"

"Yes."

"Did he say what he was planning to do?"

"No, he did not."

"What did you do after supper?"

"I studied for a time and then retired."

"Studied?"

"Yes. I am enrolled in two night classes at the Nanyang University."

"You didn't go out at all, then?"

"No."

"Did anyone come to see you, or call you on the telephone?"

"No," Misha said. Once again, her eyes focused on me. "You—you do not think that I—"

"Why not?" I said. "You were involved with him, weren't you? Maybe he wanted to break things off and you didn't. Maybe you lost your head."

Her jaw began to tremble. "I loved Philip Ormsby, in my own way." Her words were barely audible. "And he loved me in his. A woman does not kill the man she loves. Do you not understand this?"

"I don't understand anything right now, Misha," I said.

There were tears in her eyes now, brimming, glistening wetly in the overhead lights.

"Please," she whispered. "Please go, now. I wish to be alone. I wish—" Abruptly, she stood and hurried across the linoleum to an open doorway and threw the door shut behind her. After a moment, I could hear her sobbing brokenly in there.

I sat for a time and looked at my hands. If it was an act, she was as good as Hepburn and better than Taylor. In spite of myself, I began to feel like a damn heel.

Finally, I got myself on my feet and let myself out, quietly.

Kim Tat Puteh lived, according to the Singapore telephone directory,

at Number 10 Singsep Way, near the Jalan Besar Sports Stadium.

The address turned out to be an antiquated four-story building that somehow managed to retain a semblance of respectability. It had been repainted within the last two years or so, and had undergone a face-lifting of sorts. While it was still not the Raffles Hotel, it was middle-class enough so that its tenants—mostly Malays and Indians, I judged—were able to consider themselves successful by Asian standards.

I found Kim Tat's flat, on the top floor, and rang the bell. There was no response. I rang it again and rapped on the paneling. Nothing from inside. I tried the knob, just for the hell of it, but it was securely locked.

I turned and started down the hall. Just before I reached the stairs, the door to one of the other flats opened and an old, grim-faced nag put her head out and scowled at me.

I asked her, in Malay, if she had seen Kim Tat. Yes, she had seen him; he had gone out some time ago. Of course she did not know where. Did I think she was the type to pry in the affairs of her neighbors? I smiled a little at that, and she put her head back inside and slammed the door.

From the public telephone on Singsep Way, I got the information operator on the line and asked her for Evan Sidemark's number in Johore Bahru. It was a long taxi road along Bukit Timah Road and

across the Causeway to Johore Bahru, and I thought it a good idea to make sure Sidemark was home before going there; I still had no idea how much time I had before Ormsby's body was found.

It was very hot in the booth, and I wiped sweat from my face as I waited. The aspirin I had taken a my flat had not helped much; my head still pounded incessantly.

On the eighth ring, a lilting Chinese woman's voice answered "Evan Sidemark residence. I help you, please?"

"Mr. Sidemark."

"Who is calling, please?"

"A friend."

"I am sorry. Mr. Sidemark not at home. I will take a message."

"Do you know where he's gone?" I asked her. It's very important that I reach him."

"You wish to speak to *mem* Sidemark?"

"Yes, all right."

I did more waiting. Finally, a clipped and cultured female voice came on the wire. "This is Mrs. Evan Sidemark. May I help you?"

"I'm a friend of your husband's, Mrs. Sidemark," I said. "Can you tell me where he's gone?"

"Would the nature of your call be social, Mr. —?"

"Jordan," I said. I was not going to give her my right name. "No, it's business. It concerns a billing my company received, which we feel is grossly in error."

"But it is Sunday, Mr. Jordan. Surely—"

"This is imperative, Mrs. Sidemark. We have to get this matter straightened out immediately."

I listened to silence for a moment. Then she said, "Very well. Mr. Sidemark left a short while ago; he had some affairs to attend to at the firm offices. You have the address of Ormsby and Sidemark, Ltd., do you not, Mr. Jordan?"

"I've got it," I said.

I caught another taxi a block away.

Ormsby and Sidemark, Ltd. was a modern, good-sized building near the docks on Keppel Road. The offices were at the rear, on Perak Street; the warehouse and shipping and receiving facilities faced toward the harbor.

I had the driver leave me off on Perak Street. Parked in front of the building was Sidemark's expensive, low-slung British sports sedan, its polished gray hood gleaming brilliantly in the sunlight.

I stood at it for a moment, then went up to the front door and touched the latch. It was locked. I peered through one of the chinks in the bamboo blinds shading the windows. The interior was dark, the rows of desks standing still and silent on the tiled floor. At the rear I could see the private offices, side by side, belonging to Ormsby and Sidemark. Both were empty and without lights.

I stepped back. I had a faintly



uneasy feeling now, as if things inside there were not quite right. Sidemark, I knew, rarely concerned himself with anything in the warehouse and storage section; but if he was in the building now—and the presence of his car said that he was—he had to be in that particular section.

I went down to the corner and turned there and walked to Keppel Road. The parking area and the loading dock at the rear were empty; each of the two corrugated iron folding doors over the twin warehouse loading entrances were closed. I climbed the cement steps at one end of the dock and went to the small door marked: *Shipping Office*. I turned the knob; it opened under

my hand. The back of my neck prickled.

The narrow cubicle was dark, and the single desk and linoleum-covered counter were cleared of papers. I closed the door, quietly, and stood listening for a moment. There was no sound.

Through the glass-paneled window in the wall opposite, I could see the shadowed mounds and masses of goods stacked on pallets or suspended platforms or on the concrete floor of the high-ceilinged warehouse. I crossed to the open archway leading out there and peered into the gloom; when my eyes became accustomed to the shrouded half light, I moved out onto the concrete.

I made my way slowly down the main aisle toward the rear of the warehouse, where a connecting door led into the office area. One side of the aisle contained the export goods: crates of miniature, hand-wrought kris, Malay swords, I marked for export to the Philippines, barrels of refined palm oil destined for the European market, wooden freight boxes of water jars consigned to a native dealer in Jogjakarta. The other side had the import items: bolts of expensive English tweed for the exclusive men's tailors in Raffles and Collyer Quays, crates and drums and boxes of industrial machinery from the United States, raw pepper from Sarawak in northwest Borneo.

My steps echoed hollowly as I moved amongst all this; it was the

only sound in the stillness. I passed an ancient, American-made forklift, its twin blades jutting out waist high like opened and entreating arms.

Ahead of me, then, I could see the faint illumination cast by a night light over the connecting door. Looking there, I came around a pallet of oblong wooden boxes marked *Hand Tools* and stenciled for a small village in Kota Bahru—and very nearly fell over the man lying on the floor there.

It was Sidemark. He was face down, and there was blood on the back of his hand. I knelt beside him and lifted one of his arms and felt for a pulse. He was still alive. I let his arm drop, and then my eyes touched on one of the oblong wooden boxes from the pallet I had just passed. The lid had been pried off with a crowbar lying near it.

I went there and looked inside. Wood-curl excelsior had been pulled away, and there was enough light from the night bulb for me to make out the contents.

Sub-machine guns.

There were fifteen or twenty of them in there, packed in cosmoline or some other kind of heavy grease, and a few thousand rounds of ammunition. I could not make out the markings on them, but if they were not of Russian or Red Chinese origin I would be very greatly surprised. I would be very greatly surprised.

I stood up and turned, and a voice said quietly, "You will raise your hands to your waist, *tuan* Connell,

and then you will stand very still."

He came out of a pocket of darkness beneath one of the suspended platforms and into the pale lighted area in front of me. In his right hand was a German Luger, and his face was as expressionless as ever.

A lot of things began to make sense, then. I raised my hands, slowly, and held them at my belt. I said, "You had a nice little set-up here for awhile, didn't you, Kim Tat?"

He regarded me stoically.

"The way I see it, you've been smuggling weapons to the guerillas in Northern Malaya right under everybody's noses. But then Ormsby tumbled to it. Maybe he found this shipment accidentally during that search I know he conducted to see if those two coolies had stolen anything else besides the cheese. Did he threaten to go to the *polis*? Or did he try to cut himself in on the operation? My guess is the latter; there's a lot of money in black market arms these days, and Ormsby was a greedy man."

"Tuan Ormsby was a fool," Kim Tat said tonelessly.

I was standing behind Sidemark's prone form, next to the open arms box, and from the corner of my eye I could see a small opening on my right between the pallet of "hand tools" and a row of stacked barrels of copra. It was only a couple of steps away, but it might as well have been a couple of hundred.

I wet my lips and said, "How does

this sound? Ormsby called you out to his house in Tanglin last night to confront you with what he had discovered. But he underestimated the type of thing you were running here, and that mistake got his throat cut for him. But you had to divert suspicion from yourself and from the warehouse. A search would have uncovered the guns before you had time to get them moved out.

"You knew that there wouldn't be any search if the *polis* had the 'killer' in custody, and that must have been when you remembered the argument he and I had had. You knew what kind of reputation I have with the authorities—it's common enough knowledge—and you knew they wouldn't be likely to look any further once they had their hands on me." I paused, watching him. "How did you find me last night, Kim Tat?"

He shrugged lightly.

"It was not difficult," he said. "There are members of the Barisan Socialis Party in all walks of Singapore life."

That explained it, all right. The Barisan Socialis Party was the local Communist Activists' union, and their number was large and widespread on the Island. A couple of telephone calls and he would have learned my whereabouts easily and discreetly in no more than an hour. I had been way the hell out in left field in my estimation of the "gentle" Kim Tat Puteh.

I said, "So you picked me up

after I left The Lair on Lavander Street and took me out to Ormsby's and left me on the floor in the study. I was obviously too drunk to recognize you, or anything that was happening; you wouldn't have taken the chance of leaving me alive otherwise."

I smiled without humor. "It was a nice enough trick, but the thing I don't understand is why you didn't phone the *polis* anonymously. You must have known I'd come out of it by morning, and that the chances of the body being discovered accidentally before I did were pretty slim."

He opened his mouth to say something, but in that moment Sidemark made a groaning sound on the floor and began to stir. Kim Tat took his eyes off me for a fraction of a second.

I threw myself sideways, squeezing into the narrow opening I had seen earlier. Kim Tat emitted a hoarse shout in Malay, and I heard the roar of the Luger. Pain seared across my trailing right arm, numbing it; then I was through the opening and into a cleared area between the rows of stacked goods.

I ran down there a little way until I reached several skids of thick hemp rope, I dropped to my hands and knees and scuttled behind one of them, holding my breath, ears straining.

The silence was acute and charged with tension. I knew that he was still somewhere near the sub-machine gun boxes, listening as I was for

some sound of movement. He was willing to wait me out; I could not get to either entrance without him seeing me.

Slowly and carefully, I crawled out on the other side of the skid of rope. My mouth was dry with the taste of fear. I had no weapon, and there was nothing that I could see to use effectively against a handgun.

I peered down this second cleared area. Ten-foot piles of empty pallets, stacked close together, were on the opposite side; there was no way I could get over them and if I tried to go around them, into the main aisleway, Kim Tat would spot me immediately. I was trapped, all right. Unless—

My eyes had picked up something else. It was the ancient forklift I had seen on my way in. I crawled down to it on my hand and knees, taking air with short, silent breaths. After what seemed like an eternity, I reached the rear of the lift.

It had been parked so that its rear end and the driver's side were partially hidden behind crates at the main aisleway. I got my left hand on the cold metal bar at the rear and lifted myself into a crouch; my right arm was useless. I leaned in on the open side and felt around on the dashboard until my fingers touched the ignition key; it was the firm's policy to leave it in the lock. I turned it to the On position. It made a small click that barely discernible even to my own ears. There were no dash-

board lights, nothing to show that I had switched it on.

I reached over then and found the gearshift and traced it with my fingers; the thing was old enough and small enough so that it only had two speeds, forward and reverse. Whoever had driven it last had parked it in the forward position.

I put my left foot into the rung set into the metal side plate and lifted myself prone across the seat; I was fairly certain that the high dashboard, and the wide cylinder and cross-bars of the lift forks would hide me from Kim Tat's view. Still, I lay there for a moment, not breathing at all now. The warehouse remain shrouded in silence.

I groped with my left foot, gently until I found the clutch, and then pushed it to the floor. It made no sound. I brought my right foot under and got it on the accelerator. I raised my left hand to the dashboard and found the starter and put my thumb on it.

All right, I thought. Part of my job at Ormsby and Sidemark, Ltd. had had been moving freight in and out with this lift. It was in need of repairs, and I had had trouble starting it on occasion. If the engine didn't catch on the first or second try, I was through with it; Kim Tat would be down on me in a matter of seconds once he heard the cough of the lift's starter.

I worked wetness onto my lips and inhaled deeply, and then I raised up on the seat and hit the starter.



It whirred, whirred, didn't catch. Frantically, I pumped the accelerator and shoved the button in again. This time the engine came to life with a guttural rasp. I wrapped my left hand on the wheel and snapped the clutch out; the undersized rear tires spun, smoking on the concrete, and then took hold.

The lift shot forward, the engine roaring now, the rear snapping around. I fought the wheel, got it straightened. Through the cross-bars I could see Kim Tat crouching in the middle of the aisleway now with the Lugar raised in his hand.

Flame erupted, once, twice. One of the bullets came through and sang past my right ear; the other pinged sharply and metallically off one of the bars. I saw Kim Tat stand motionless for an instant, indecisive, and then as the lift hurtled toward

him, he tried to run. I let go of the wheel and jumped out to the side.

I hit the concrete on my numbed right shoulder, rolling, and when I came up I heard Kim Tat scream, a high-pitched, terrified sound over the amplified roar of the forklift's engine. But then the scream was chopped off in a thundering, echoing crash and I knew the machine had slammed into the rear wall between the offices and the warehouse.

I got to my feet painfully and walked up there. The lift lay on its side at the base of the wall, its rear wheels spinning. The stench of gasoline from its ruptured tank was heavy in the muddy air. I took one look at Kim Tat and then turned away and tried to keep from being sick.

One of the gleaming metal forks had caught him just above the belt at the moment of impact. There was not much left of him now at all.

It was much later that night when the *polis* let me go home. They had not been particularly pleasant or gentle with me, but I did not think there would be any repercussions: the authorities had been trying for a very long time to put an end to the smuggling of weapons to the Communist guerillas in the northern provinces.

I took a long shower and lay down on my bed under the mosquito netting and did some thinking. I had most of the story now, or at least enough of it so that the rest could be tied together without any difficulty.

Sidemark had told me what had happened that afternoon after I revived him in his office, while we were waiting for the *polis* to arrive. As his wife had told me on the telephone, he had come over to the office to catch up on some paperwork.

He had come in through the front entrance, quietly enough, and gone to his office. He had been working there when he heard noises coming from the warehouse. He went out there through the connecting door and saw Kim Tat opening the arms box—checking, probably, to make sure Ormsby had not tampered with the guns. Sidemark asked him what he was doing, and Kim Tat pulled the Luger and had him turn around and clubbed him.

It was easy enough to fill in the rest of it: Kim Tat had heard me come in and had hidden under the platform to see who it was. When he recognized me, he must have been a little surprised; he had expected me, I'm sure, to be in *polis* custody by that time. If I had not gotten away from him, it is likely that he would have shot me and then finished off Sidemark, making it look like a double killing. Maybe the *polis* would have gone for it, and maybe not; there is no way of telling now.

My last question to Kim Tat—about why he had not called the authorities after depositing me on Ormsby's study floor—had a very simple answer. Although Ormsby

lived alone, he had a combination cook-and-housekeeper who came every morning at six, Sundays included, to prepare his breakfast and do the daily cleaning. Kim Tat apparently knew this, and figured that in my state I could not possibly revive before the Chinese woman got there and found both of us. It was much safer that way than calling in an anonymous tip, which any police department is skeptical of these days, that in Singapore being no exception.

But what Kim Tat could not have possibly known was that on this day the woman had contracted some kind of flu bug and had not come at all. In fact, the authorities learned that it was she who had been on the phone, calling to inform Ormsby

of this, when I had come out of it that morning.

That was all of it.

I lay there in the heat of my flat and thought about the way things work out. Except for simple, everyday happenings like a woman catching the flu and a man going down to his office to do a little extra work on Sundays, I would be in jail charged with a murder I had not committed.

Coincidence, fate or divine intervention? You can never really know. I was very glad for it under any name at all.

The moon, big and yellow and tropical and splendid, had begun to cast its clean white shine through the bedroom window before I finally slept.

Complete in the Next Issue—

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by M. G. OGAN

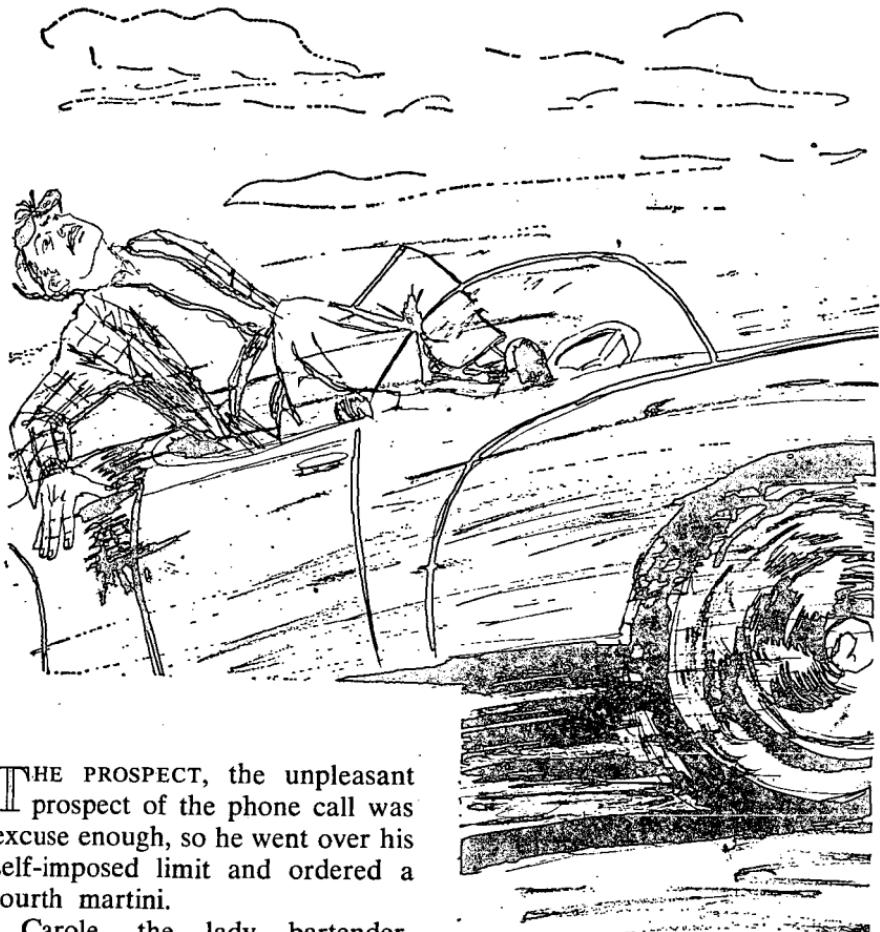
They were all waiting for me out there — the miserable little army of long haired-boys and their dirty little jills, the stone-faced gun boys — all waiting. For I had one last command performance — to die by violence before the dawn. Don't miss this unforgettable story of youth gone mad in a city where trackless Murder was king.

Eulogy in a Phone Booth

"Mourn for me, my dearest one.

For you see—I am already dead."

by HENRY SLESAR



THE PROSPECT, the unpleasant prospect of the phone call was excuse enough, so he went over his self-imposed limit and ordered a fourth martini.

Carole, the lady bartender,

made it colder and drier than the other ones and delivered it with a skin show and a flashing professional smile. He was accustomed to professional displays of teeth, bosoms and charm, so he downed his drink quickly and made his way to the phone booth, the silvery taste of the gin strong in his mouth.

He dialed a number, waited.

"Hello?"

"Miss Hirschhorn?"

"This is Miss Hirschborn, yes."

"Oh, sorry. They gave me the wrong spelling."

"Who is this?"

"My name is Donaldson, Miss Hirschborn, I'm sorry to disturb you at this hour, but I'm afraid it's my job. I mean, I should have come straight to your house instead of phoning, but it's pouring like hell—in Westwood, anyway, I suppose it's no different out your way—"

"Mr. Donaldson, are you sure you didn't intend to call the Weather Bureau?"

He smiled, but he kept the smile out of his voice; it would have hardly been proper.

"I'm sorry, Miss Hirschborn, I'll explain. You see, I'm with the Los Angeles *Examiner*, I do the entertainment news, me and my boss Al Hall, thought it would be a good idea if I got a statement from you. Like I said, I should have come to see you personally, only this rain started, and I

stopped at this bar to dry out—"

"It didn't work," the woman said flatly. "Because frankly, Mr. Donaldson, you're not making much sense."

"We know you were a friend of Everett Dawson."

"What?"

"Well, that's why we thought somebody should call you, and see what you had to say—"

"Why should I say anything about Ev Dawson?"

"Well, Mr. Hall thought, since you were such good friends with Mr. Dawson, you might want to say a few words about him, not a eulogy exactly, just about how you felt about him."

"What was that word you used?"

"Huh?"

"That word. What the hell did you use that word for? *Eulogy*. About Ev."

"It doesn't have to be that, Miss Hirschborn, just a statement is all we want, something we can print as part of our news coverage tomorrow."

"Now, listen, you—"

"We'd just like to know what you thought of the man, what kind of guy he was."

"Was? Ev?"

"Oh, my God." He put his hand over the mouthpiece, and then took it away. "Oh, my God, Miss Hirschborn, don't tell me you didn't know. Don't tell me I'm the first."

"Know what? Know what, damn you?"

"That he died. I mean, he was killed, this afternoon, in that crazy Italian car of his."

"You're a liar! You're crazy! I spoke to Ev last night. He was drunk, he called me from Santa Monica, someplace on the ocean and—"

"I'm sorry," he said gravely. "Believe me, Miss Hirschborn, I never wanted to be the one who told you, I thought you knew. I mean, it was on the radio already. Didn't you hear the radio at all today?"

"No."

"I don't know what to say. I'm just sorry that—Miss Hirschborn?"

The woman wasn't answering. She had turned her head away from the receiver, but he could still hear her anguished sounds of shock and grief.

"Miss Hirschborn, please listen to me. I'm awful sorry about this, no kidding, it's not that I knew the guy or anything. I used to see him in the movies, but I didn't really know him. Of course, you were real close to him, but the things some people said about him—I know this is a hell of a time to talk about this—"

"How?" the voice at the other end asked. It had lost all its similarity to the one which had first responded. It had become raw and naked and unlovely. "How did he

die?" the unlovely voice demanded. "Oh, God, how?"

"I told you all I heard, that his car hit a tree or a pole or something. You remember how he used to drive, real fast and crazy, wasn't he arrested or something last month? Listen, I won't keep you long, all I need is something I can bring back to the paper, anything at all. Just a statement, Miss Hirschborn, about what you thought of Everett Dawson. What I mean is, was he really such a bum like people said? Was he really a louse?"

"How can you say that?" the woman shrieked, and the man in the phone booth jerked the receiver away from his ear. "My God, you don't know a thing about him, not a thing! How wonderful he was—how kind, how he hated phonies. How soft he was—"

"Well, gee, Miss Hirschborn, I mean, I'm not arguing with you or anything—Miss Hirschborn?" The woman was crying wildly, unable to respond. "Please, just give me another minute. All I wanted to know was—what I'm trying to find out, a lot of people didn't think he was much of a person; they just didn't like the guy. You've got to admit, lovable he wasn't—"

"You damned fool!" the broken, crying, screaming voice said, almost shattering the phone's diaphragm. "There was nobody like



Ev, nobody! Nobody that deserved more love. Nobody, nobody, nobody . . . ”

The rest was sobbing.

The man in the phone booth waited, but it was clear that his telephone interview was at an end. He sighed, and then tapped his fingers against the mouthpiece.

“Miss Hirschborn? Peggy?”

After a moment:

“What?”

“Honey. Are you all right?”

“What?”

“Look, Peggy, I’m sorry.”

“Who is this? For the love of God, who is this?”

A pause.

“It’s me, Peg. Look, I mean it, I’m sorry.”

“Oh, God! Oh, my God!”

“Yeah, it’s Ev, sweetie, and I’m sorry, I’m real sorry. I put you on pretty good, didn’t I? Maybe a little too good—”

“Ev! You bastard!”

“Honey, I already apologized. I don’t know what came over me. You remember what I said, yesterday, when I called you from Santa Monica, about how blue I was feeling? Well, I wasn’t feeling any better tonight, I just drove around, eighty miles an hour or something like that, trying to make the blues go away. Then I stopped at this bar in Westwood—hey, they’ve got a lady bartender here, how about that? Her name’s Carole, and she’s got a neckline that spills over every time she makes a drink.”

“To do such a thing, destroy me this way!”

“Honey, that’s what I mean, that’s what I wanted to know. It’s what I had to know, don’t you see? That somebody would really care. That somebody would cry for me when it happened when it finally happened.”

“Oh, Ev—”

“So I thought of this, you see? Sitting here, lapping up the gin, I thought of it. Calling you up, shoving my voice up into my nose so you wouldn’t recognize it, and calling you, hearing what you’d say.”

"And now you know," the woman said bitterly. "Now you know, you crud, you—monster. And don't call me again. You hear me, Ev? Don't you ever call me again!"

She hung up, but she was obviously still in tears, and for the man in the phone booth, it was clearly a satisfying sound. He replaced the phone receiver with a small smile.

Then he left the booth and returned to the bar.

He had one more dry martini, for the road. His bill wasn't even eight dollars, but he left ten, and

Carole accepted it as if it had been a personal tribute.

Then he went outside, into the rainswept streets of Westwood, and handed the parking attendant his ticket. His car, an Italian import with the look of speed, was out front two minutes later. He climbed into the driver's seat. Then he whipped the car out onto the wet, glassy, treacherous road.

When Peggy Hirschborn's phone rang the next morning, she gave the caller a brief, dry-eyed, and unflattering eulogy before learning that, this time, the call had been genuine.

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September, 1966

Letters to the Editor

Our island had become a den of thieves and no one could find the answer. No one except a little old spinster with a flair for bad verse and a nose for other folks' business

by **HARRIET HUGHES CROWLEY**

THE DAY IT ALL began was a Monday. I remember because the man who, so to speak, fired the starting gun entered the office of our weekly newspaper, *The Islander*, on the heels of our only contributor, who met the Monday morning deadline decreed by Tim, my husband, the paper's founder and editor.

She was Miss Priscilla Severance, a spinster in her mid-sixties, who wrote a poem for us every week. They were simple little odes to whatever Nature was up to at the moment. She wrote them in bed at night when she couldn't

sleep, thus putting to good account otherwise wasted time and not stealing time from her bread and butter occupation, which was the creation of all sorts of decorative works of art made out of shells.

In the off-season months she collected the shells and worked them into their intricate designs and in the summer months she sold them to the vacationers and tourists who swarmed over the Island.

I remember how she looked that day—the same way she looked every day. She dressed so that



if she found herself with a few spare minutes she could take to the beaches to collect shells.

A few little wisps of white hair stuck out from underneath her red hat, which had a peaked crown and fitted her head so snugly that no wind could blow it off.

She wore red sneakers and a brown tweed suit of utmost durability with a hemline most unfash-

ionably below mid-calf, and a brown leather windbreaker.

She had very bright blue eyes and her face was tanned the year round and had many fine lines around the eyes and mouth.

She was about five feet tall and very slender. Perhaps because sandpipers were her constant companions when she was shelling, she darted around the way they did.

She and Tim cut short their conversation to listen to the man who was talking to Susie, our twenty-two-year-old secretary. I stopped what I was doing to listen to the man too and so did Tony, our young business manager.

The man was reading from a list which sounded like the catalogue for one of Parke-Bernet's major auctions—rare pieces of scrimshaw, silver trays and dishes, paintings and prints, and a large and valuable Federal mirror among them. They had been stolen from his summer home on a high bluff overlooking the ocean a mile or so outside of town. He was here to put an ad in the paper offering a reward of \$500 for information leading to their recovery.

"I assume you've been to our neighbors across the street," Tim said, pointing to the police headquarters we could see through our front windows.

"I just came from there. That's why I'm here," the man replied.

He said he'd flown all the way from his home in St. Louis only to hear a speech by the chief of police, Wallie Swain, on *What Is The World Coming To?* The chief had deplored crime on the mainland at considerable length. He

had said that while it was regrettable to have a housebreaking on the Island, the thing to bear in mind was that anyone could stroll in perfect safety around our streets any time of the day or night and they'd be taking their lives in their hands if they did it any place else. He said it beat him what was going on these days—"why, just a while back there wasn't no more crime than was necessary!"

The man said he might have found that mildly amusing if he had heard it under happier circumstances.

Tim asked him when the robbery had taken place and the man replied that that was one of many mysteries. The only known fact was that the caretaker had discovered it two weeks ago and reported it immediately to the police.

Tim said he knew it looked strange for us to be learning about it at this late date.

"Actually, relations are rather strained between *The Islander* and Chief Swain and his boys. It's the only police department I've ever heard of where no records are kept. But even if they kept a blotter, I doubt that we'd have access to it."

"I know. I read your editorials," the man said.

"They don't improve relations," Tim observed.

"I can imagine. But don't let up on them!" the man said as he took leave.

Miss Severance looked so stricken that it was as if she had just heard of the death of someone near and dear. The dignity of the Island meant more to her than anything else. She was acutely aware of the way it was diminishing—and of how little most Islanders seemed to care. She knew it reflected what was going on throughout the world but that was no excuse for it in her eyes. It was all the more reason for Islanders to cherish the pride and independence for which they had been famous.

"I feel like running across the street and shaking that Wallie Swain until his teeth rattle," she said.

There was both anger and sorrow in her voice. "He makes a fool of himself, but that's not the half of it. He makes fools of all of us too. I don't know what's happened to him or why people put up with him!"

"For one thing, he's afraid to investigate," Tim said. "Afraid of turning up evidence against a relative or a relative of a relative or a friend of a friend."

Miss Severance looked scornful.

"We could survive a black sheep or two if it came to that—and it probably wouldn't. The thieves could be off-Islanders just as well as Islanders. What we can't stand up against is being made to look like a pack of idiots

who can't run their own little Island!"

Before the paper was out we had heard of another robbery and by the following week we knew that we were in the midst of a crime wave. It looked as if every summer home would be bare by the time the owners arrived for the season.

We would hear about the thefts from caretakers who had discovered them, from distraught owners calling from their mainland homes, and in a variety of other ways but never from the police. Across the street there was no flurry of activity. Everything was going on in the usual serene and casual way.

Letters to the editor from off-Island didn't confine themselves to criticism of the chief. Just as Miss Severance had foreseen, they held all Islanders to account. The letter writers asked what the board of selectmen was doing and wanted to know why every Islander didn't demand that its police department do what it was paid to do.

It was mortifying for Miss Severance. She hated to see the letters published but said gamely, "We have to take our medicine! Maybe they'll wake people up!"

In one way Islanders were too wakeful. They seemed to be staying up all night looking for reasons to implicate each other in the wave of robberies. With the police doing nothing, amateur detectives

sprung up all around us. They came into our office and asked to speak to Tim in private and whispered their dark suspicions of their neighbors.

Some didn't bother with that much caution and blurted out their accusations for all of us to hear. Which happened one day in April when Miss Severance was helping with the mailing. A woman demanded that we do something immediately about a prominent citizen who had a Federal mirror hanging over his mantle.

It hadn't been there until very recently.

She had no doubt at all that it was the one stolen in the first of the robberies reported—nor any doubt, we were all sure, that she was entitled to the \$500 reward which was still being offered in the ad in our paper.

Miss Severance listened until she could stand no more. She had a rolled up paper in her hand and brought it down on the desk with a resounding whack:

"One Federal mirror looks like every other Federal mirror," she said in a voice shaking with anger. "We'll clear this up in short order!"

She picked up the phone and called the only antique dealer who stayed on the Island the year round, a man who was entirely reputable. He had recently sold a Federal mirror to the man in question, he told Miss Severance. It

was one he had had in stock long before the robberies began.

"This is intolerable," Miss Severance declared when the woman, after impugning the dealer's honesty, had slammed the front door behind her. "What's happening to this Island? We simply can't let it go on!"

She looked from one to the other of us, so stricken with shame that I wished there were something to say to make her feel better. I was glad when the phone rang and Susie said it was for me.

I picked up the phone on my desk and heard the voice of a good friend in New Bedford, Don Simmons, who owned a yawl which he often sailed over to the Island.

Don said I must be getting a little stir crazy on the Island after the long winter. I told him he was exactly right.

He said that he could do something about it. "Would you like to be the only reporter present at the most spectacular event of the century?" he asked.

"And what would that be?"

"The raising of the *Andrea Doria*!"

He said there was a crew working out of New Bedford on a salvage boat called *Uppermost* that was so close to bringing off the incredible feat that his only worry was that we'd be too late to see it.

"I've arranged for them to take us along. We'll be on the deck



of the *Uppermost* when the waters part and the *Andrea Doria* shoots into the air!"

"Great!"

Don explained that while he was putting his yawl in the water he ran into the captain of the salvage crew, a man named DaCosta. He was a fascinating character who had captivated Don with tales of his underwater exploits in all oceans of the globe.

I was elated when, after discussing it at length, I hung up and began telling Tim and the others about it.

"I don't blame you for wanting to get away from this sick little place," Miss Severance said. "Only don't get your hopes up too high about seeing that ship shoot up from the depths. Too many salvagers have tried and failed."

She asked if we remembered that soon after that foggy night when the Italian liner was rammed

by the Swedish ship, *Stockholm*, two of Jacques-Yves Cousteau's divers had visited the scene. It was their verdict that the *Doria* would never be raised. It was down two hundred twenty feet and divers couldn't remain at that depth long enough to accomplish anything.

"It's my recollection that one of them did stay down too long and ended in the hospital here", she said.

I told her that Don had told me that something similar had happened to Da Costa's crew but it didn't deter the salvage operation. "They had to be put in the *Uppermost's* decompression chamber", I said. "They were surprised by a shark and were brought up too fast."

"But this is the thing that Don's all excited about and you will be too", I went on. "They've already done a lot more than any of the other salvage outfits. They've actually been *inside* the *Doria* and brought up some of its treasures!"

"Well, that *is* news", Miss Severance said. "As I recall there was some great amount of cash—"

"Over a million dollars in Italian and American currency", I said, "and some jewels in the safe and a bronze life-sized statue of Admiral Doria that's worth some ungodly sum and an enormous sterling silver plaque, just for starters."

"If they get all that loot, why

should they bother bringing up the ship?" Tim asked.

"Oh, but they have to!" I explained it as Don had told it to me. "It gives them a big jump on the other claimants, the Italian government and the insurance companies. They've got a new scheme for raising her—pumping in some kind of foam that makes her rise from her own buoyancy."

"Has your friend been aboard the *Uppermost*?" Miss Severance asked.

I stopped to think a moment.

"I'm not sure," I finally replied. "He was talking to this Da Costa someplace on the waterfront but I don't know exactly where."

Tim said he wasn't too crazy to have me taking off with a crew of strange men.

I said Don would be there, and anyway we'd have a chance to look them over before I actually left.

"I'm afraid you'll get out there and want to come back and won't be able to," Tim said.

He reminded me, needlessly, that though it was April the wind was blowing just as hard as it had in mid-winter and was every bit as cold.

I began ticking off all the things I had to ward off the cold, like foul weather gear, thermal underwear and the new insulated jacket he had given me for Christmas. Miss Severance looked at her watch and said she had to run.

DAY AFTER DAY I waited for a call from Don or Da Costa. I had all the necessary clothing together so that I wouldn't delay them, but nothing happened. I tried several times to call Don and when I couldn't reach him, had to assume that he and the *Uppermost* had left me behind.

I was still waiting but getting more and more discouraged by the following Monday when, to Jim's annoyance, Miss Severance failed to show up with her poem. We hadn't seen her since our talk about the *Doria*. By five that afternoon Tim was really provoked.

"I suppose," he said, "that having even one punctual contributor was too much to ask for."

"Would you like me to call her?" Susie asked.

"Well, give her till tomorrow. She'll surely show by then."

On Tuesday Miss Severance didn't appear and Susie did call her and got no answer.

Susie called at short intervals the rest of Tuesday and all Wednesday morning and still got no answer.

"You know, this isn't like Miss Severance," she finally said to Tim.

"I was thinking the same thing", Tim said. "I wonder if she could have left the Island unexpectedly."

It didn't seem likely. Not only was it a major event for Miss Severance to leave the Island but

she had recently said she was behind in her shell work and had to make every minute count until the beginning of the summer season.

Nevertheless, Tim and Susie called the airport and the steamship office. Miss Severance had not been seen at either. Susie called the hospital but she was not a patient there. Miss Severance's friends and neighbors in the little seaside village across the Island where she lived told Susie they had been trying to reach Miss Severance too and couldn't imagine where she was.

"Susie, I think you better take a run out there and find out what's going on," Tim said.

What he was afraid of was that Miss Severance had fallen and broken a hip or had a stroke or a heart attack. He told Susie to walk right in if the door wasn't locked and that if it was to look around for some other way to get in.

Both Tim and Tony left the office right after Susie. I was alone, sitting at my desk by the window putting together the bits and pieces of fraternal news, such a boring job that my mind was only half on it and I was gazing absently out the window more than at my typewriter.

A police car drove up to the headquarters. I was vaguely aware that two policemen got out I was jogged quickly out of my reverie by what suddenly materialized

between them—a streaming mop of wildly blowing blond hair, unmistakably Susie's.

In the few seconds that it took me to cross the street, Susie had been whisked through the room where Chief Swain sat alone behind the desk. I heard a sound that I was sure was a cell door clangng shut.

I asked to see Susie. The chief replied that breaking and entering was serious business and I couldn't see her.

I told the chief that she was only carrying out her boss's orders.

"I can charge him as an accomplice," he said.

Through the window I saw Tim going up the steps to our office and I ran back across the street.

Tim listened with growing concern. He looked at his watch.

"They couldn't have nabbed her any faster if they'd been waiting for her," he said.

Tony came back and we told him what had happened. He too thought it strange that Susie hardly had time to get to Miss Severance's before the police arrested her. He said he thought at this time of year scout cars were as rare as bathers on that part of the Island.

"I know," Tim said. "It's quite a coincidence. Looks as if the police were expecting us or had some reason to be watching Miss Severance's comings and goings."

Tim said the first thing was to

get Susie sprung and called our lawyer. He was on the mainland but his wife promised to try to locate him and have him call Tim.

The next thing was to find out definitely whether Miss Severance was or was not in her house. Since we had already forfeited one member of the staff of four to this cause we had to proceed with caution.

Tony finally located a neighbor of Miss Severance's who had a key to her house. She let him in. Miss Severance was not there. Her house was in its usual applie pie order but the workroom off the kitchen struck Tony as too spic and span. Usually there were shells and tools spread around. Tony thought it strange that they were gone.

From there he went to all the beaches where she might have gone shelling and perhaps met with an accident. It took him until long after dark and he was using the spotlight on his jeep and a powerful flashlight before he was through.

When he came back to the office he said he guessed there was no alternative but to ask the police for help.

"If they have any clues to her whereabouts they'd take great joy in concealing them from us," Tim said.

He said we needed the lawyer more than ever, as he picked up

the phone and called his home again.

There was no answer. His wife was undoubtedly sound asleep, which reduced our chances of getting in touch with the lawyer that night to nil.

Tim was frantic. He said it was a hell of a way to run a newspaper. With less than twelve hours to go before the paper went to press, the lawyer was gone the one time he was needed; one quarter of our staff was in jail and our leading contributor and stanchest supporter was missing without a clue. He said he couldn't be more out of touch holed up in a cave in Tibet.

"Damn it all to hell, Tony," Tim cried, "why don't you have any relatives on the police force? Everyone else does!"

"Oh, I'm not entirely without my connections," Tony said with an apologetic little laugh. "I've got old Sam Sousa! He treats me like a long lost son!"

"He's not a *policeman*, is he?" I asked, remembering the old character who did odd jobs in the summer and spent the rest of the year wandering aimlessly up and down Main Street dressed in an old overcoat which reached nearly to his ankles and an incredibly battered old fedora.

Tony said the old man was retired from the force but since there was no pension for Island police, the chief had cooked up some

special night duty to tide him over the off-season months.

Tony didn't know exactly what the old man did. Maybe he stood out on the moors watching for UFO's. Every time Tony stopped into a certain bar on Main Street for a nightcap, he ran into old Sam Sousa. Tony felt sorry for him because he was low man on the police department totem pole and seemed so lonely that Tony had gone out of his way to talk to him with the result that the old man was his bosom buddy.

"Unfortunately, he knows about as much about what's going on at headquarters as we do," Tony said.

"You better talk to him anyway. Better than nothing," Tim said.

"No trouble finding him, that's for sure," Tony said, glancing at the clock, which said a little after eleven. "He turns up at the bar at eleven, stays till it closes at one. Never misses."

"On duty?" Tim asked.

"On duty!" Tony laughed.

Tony left, saying he'd be back practically immediately. It wouldn't take more than a minute to pump old Sam Sousa dry.

More than an hour passed. Tim paced around and said he should know better by now than to let anyone out of his sight and that Tony was probably either in jail like Susie or vanished like Miss Severance. Then Tony flew up



the steps and into the office, telling us to hurry up.

We were on our way to find Miss Severance.

"Old Sam's special duty is patrolling the wharf at night," Tony said as we hurried to the car. "And he doesn't let it interfere with his two hour whiskey break either! How do you like that?"

"I'd be crazy about it if I had hot goods to get off the Island!" Tim said.

Tony said that about a week ago Miss Severance had been snooping, as the old policeman had described it, around the wharf late at night—no place for a respectable spinster at such an hour. Sousa had reported it to the chief. The police had been looking for her ever since, keeping a watch on our office as well as her home.

They had had no more success tracking down Miss Severance than we had—until around dusk this very evening, when old Sam Sousa, coming on duty, caught sight of her and set out after her.

He lost her when she rounded a building. He turned the corner and she was gone, vanished into thin air.

Tony had learned from him that it was the Landfall Gift Shop where she herself worked in the summer. It had been closed since Labor Day but she had a key to it. Tony was sure we'd find her there.

The old policeman was waiting for us outside the gift shop, a little shingled two-story building which stood at the head of the wharf overlooking it.

Tony knocked on the door. We listened but heard no sound inside.

"Step back!" the old policeman suddenly commanded.

He had a gun in his hand and was about to aim it at the lock when Tim stopped him. He said it would bring the whole police force running and the old man reluctantly put the gun back in its holster.

The back door was flimsier than the front. Tony butted it with his shoulder. The lock held but the old dried out panels splintered and with some more shoulder pressure the boards gave way, leaving a hole large enough for us to crawl through.

The electricity had been turned off. It was colder inside than out. It pierced to the bone instantly. I thought of how tiny and fragile Miss Severance was and said she

couldn't possibly be in here and alive.

"Never underestimate Miss Severance," Tim said, following the beam of the flashlight Sam Sousa played over the bare room.

All we saw was some tables, something draped in white which turned out to be the cash register, and empty shelves. There was a narrow, steep staircase. Sam Sousa stood at the bottom of it and held the flashlight while we went up and then came up himself.

We were in a low ceilinged store room. The beam of light landed on a disorderly heap by the front window. I gasped and closed my eyes and held my breath as the others approached it cautiously.

"It's only some blankets and pillows", Tim said.

Tim and Tony were down on their hands and knees. I joined the search while Sousa held the flashlight.

"Here's where her shells are," Tony said. "A big pile of them."

There was also a roll of velvet, pincers and other tools. Typically, Miss Severance had planned not to waste any more time than she had to, but she had not done any work.

"Too cold to move her fingers," Tim observed.

"It's my guess she's in the hospital with pneumonia," I said.

"Not likely, when she had just laid in a supply of food," said Tim who had just found a paper

bag containing cold meat, cheese, and oranges as well as a slip from the supermarket cash register dated that day. There was also another bag containing empty cartons, wrappings and peelings.

Everything we found was next to the window. She had even cleaned it with a spray can of window cleaner and watched through it with a pair of binoculars which lay on the window sill.

"Imagine her going off without putting the glasses back in their case," Tim said when he found the case on the floor near the window. "She must have been pretty excited about something!"

"Darned if I can see what," said Tony as he surveyed the wharf through the binoculars.

He gave them to me. There was very little to be seen at all except when the pale beam from the distant lighthouse swept the scene and made it possible to catch the names of the few boats tied up at the wharf, all of which Tony said belonged there.

Mostly what we saw was the cold black water and more blackness. Yet something had lured Miss Severance out into that scary dark emptiness. That much was past doubt.

"We better get out of here and to the Coast Guard as fast as we can," Tim said.

WE LEFT THE old policeman and sped to the Coast Guard sta-

tion. As we approached we saw lights and activity around the dock and men boarding the cutter. We thought that word of Miss Severance's disappearance must have reached them from some other source, perhaps from Miss Severance herself, and that they were launching a search.

However, we quickly learned that not only did the commanding officer, Pete Kenny, know nothing about Miss Severance, he didn't want to hear anything Tim had to say.

Kenny had been routed out of bed only a few minutes before and was not in the best of moods. He said whatever was on our minds would have to wait no matter how urgent we thought it was. Something had come up that demanded his immediate attention.

There was a boat someplace outside the harbor that was a menace to every other boat for miles around. It had almost sunk the fishing boat which had just reported it. It had been on a steady course when the fishing boat first saw it, but then it headed straight at the fishing boat on collision course. At the last second it had swerved and missed ramming the fishing boat by inches.

"So don't bother me with your troubles till I've found out what this is all about," Kenny said.

Tim told him that, since our problem also involved a search, it

would save time if he took us along.

Kenny told us brusquely to hop aboard.

Tim, Tony, and I sat in the cabin as the cutter sped out of the harbor. We had been under way about half an hour when we slowed down. I could see nothing from the port hole and Tim said we had to stay where we were and out of the way. We could hear Kenny shouting orders. Then he shouted through a megaphone. It sounded jumbled from where we sat, but one word brought me up short.

"Uppermost!" That's the boat I'm supposed to go out on with Don, the one that's raising the *Andrea Doria!*"

The three of us dashed out on deck.

We were alongside a large cabin cruiser which was not moving. There was no wind at all and the *Uppermost* was as motionless as if it were in dry dock.

On its afterdeck there was a peculiar sort of superstructure. I'd never seen anything like it before. There were five men lined up along the rail. We were so close that we could see them blink in the glare of the cutter's searchlight.

We were so close now that Kenny no longer needed the megaphone. He asked what the trouble was.

A tall dark man at the rail

said they were having trouble with the steering.

Suddenly I felt as if I were losing my mind. I was seeing things! Another figure stood at the rail of the *Uppermost*. Much smaller than the others, it was topped by a familiar red peaked hat. I had thought so much about Miss Severance and where she could be that now I saw her where she couldn't possibly be! But Tim and Tony were seeing something too—or why their dazed expressions and open mouths?

"Where did *she* come from?" Kenny asked in a bewildered voice.

The men turned their faces towards Miss Severance. Clearly she was an even greater surprise to them. It seemed like an eternity before anyone moved. Then the men scattered from the rail of the *Uppermost* and the air was full of Pete Kenny and his men as they vaulted from the cutter to the *Uppermost*.

Tim pulled me towards the cabin. We were both knocked to the deck.

We picked ourselves up as Miss Severance was handed, like a sack of feathers, across the small expanse of open water to the deck of the cutter. We rushed her into the cabin.

We stood there laughing and making unintelligible noises until Miss Severance's appearance sobered us up. She looked shrunken

and was trembling. She protested that she'd been cold so long she was used to it, but nevertheless allowed herself to be wrapped up in some blankets Tim found.

Tony joined us and said the *Uppermost* crew didn't seem to know what, had hit them, that we'd be underway immediately, that Kenny would radio the police to be on hand for our return and that, at Tony's request, Kenny would ask the police to have Susie waiting on the dock.

"They'll find a fortune in stolen property," Miss Severance said with a wan smile, "but not a single Islander!"

"God Almighty! Why did you do it singlehanded? Why didn't you let us know what you were up to?" Tim exploded.

"There wasn't time," Miss Severance replied apologetically. "Anyway, all I really meant to do was take a look around the *Uppermost* just to find out if it really was a salvage boat."

When the *Uppermost* had finally shown up tonight—after Sam Sousa had left for his whiskey break—and after a truck had met it and sped the crew away, she had hurried down from her frigid lookout and boarded it.

If all had gone as she planned, she would have investigated that peculiar superstructure, discovered that all the signs—DANGER 15,000 LBS. PRESSURE—meant nothing and that the contraption's only

function was to look like the dispenser of the remarkable foam for raising the *Andrea Doria* but that it was actually empty. She then would have left undetected.

"I should have known they would have left part of the crew on board," she said. "It was stupid of me."

She was half inside the superstructure when she heard voices in the cabin. She hardly had time to crawl all the way inside before the two men came out of the cabin. They stayed on deck until the truck returned and all hands fell to stowing the crates of stolen goods below. She could not see the men but could hear them clearly and could tell Da Costa's voice from the others.

It was more cultivated than the others and it seemed to Miss Severence that he was enjoying himself enormously.

"Remember this big one's got the Admiral inside—if anyone should ask you," she heard him say with an easy laugh. She learned whose house had been broken into and it was her guess that the crate which Da Costa planned to pass off as the life size bronze statue of Admiral Doria if he needed to would be found to contain one of the Island's greatest treasures, a grandfather clock made by a famous Island clockmaker of the Eighteenth Century.

She had no chance to leave the

boat. They cast off and she feared she would never see the Island again. But when all was quiet on deck, even before there had been time to clear the harbor, hope began to revive. She was no stranger to boats.

She crept out of her hiding place and groped around to find out if the *Uppermost* was equipped with an auxiliary tiller on the afterdeck.

It was. Now, if only another boat would appear! Before long, to her great joy, she made out the running lights of a boat coming towards them. The *Uppermost* was skimming over the glassy sea at top speed. She took the tiller. She almost lost her own footing as she swerved towards the oncoming boat.

Miss Severance laughed as she pictured the men below, unprepared for the abrupt change of course, thrown together in a heap.

She brought the *Uppermost* so close to collision with the other boat that she even scared herself. She was back inside the superstructure when the panicky crew swarmed on deck.

With the pilot once again able to hold to his course, they returned to the cabin. Now she had to keep the *Uppermost* from putting more distance between itself and the Island. Again she took over the auxiliary tiller and steered in a crazy figure eight. Again she was

back in her hiding place before the men reached the deck. She kept up the game until the engines were cut off and the men searched frantically for mechanical trouble.

She had been almost positive that the fishing boat would report its close shave but the cutter, she said, hadn't arrived a minute too soon.

We were coming into the harbor. A bright red glow was spreading over the eastern horizon.

"We still don't know what made you link the *Uppermost* to the robberies in the first place, Miss Severance," Tim said.

"It was what your wife had to say about the shark that surprised Da Costa's men. I wondered what kind of deep sea divers would be surprised by a shark."

She had gone straight from our office to the library. What she read in one of Cousteau's books confirmed her own idea that if divers were brought to the surface every time they saw a shark the exploration of the depths would have ended before it ever began. When Cousteau's men swam on the surface, they found them more inquisitive than vicious.

Although the men were armed with knives and underwater guns, it usually took only a tap on the nose with a nail-studded billy to send a shark cruising off in another direction.

Miss Severance wondered all the more what the *Uppermost* was

up to and had to find out if it put into our harbor. She thought a few questions would clear that up. It was only after she realized that old Sam Sousa thought she was up to no good, and that his testimony wouldn't mean much anyway because of his regular absences, that she took up her vigil in the window of the shop.

We were about to land. It was light enough to see the police wagon, the uniformed men, and Susie, standing apart from them, waving her arms joyfully.

Tim looked at his watch. He had only a few hours until press time and almost a whole new paper to write. He grabbed Miss Severance's hand warmly and started to bid her good-by.

"Oh, but we almost forgot!" she said. She reached into one pocket of her windbreaker and then another. "My poem! Where can it be? Well, I think I can recite it from memory. If I go too fast for you, just slow me down. Title: 'April's Promise'. Now, the first verse."

Her voice fell into a slow rhythm like the tolling of a bell buoy:

*"Disgruntled winter creeps away,
A slip of spring revealing
With rosy tint upon the moor
And tender bud unsealing."*

She stopped and gazed thoughtfully through the porthole at the pink sky.

"Thanks for everything, Miss Severance. It's great—" Tim began.

"Second verse," she continued.

Tim looked desperate. I stole out to greet Susie and bring her aboard. When I returned with her, Miss Severance was winding up:

"Renewed in hope and purpose!"

Tim shoved paper and pencil into his pocket and bolted from the cabin.

Miss Severance turned to me. "I hope he understands that I don't intend to make a habit of turning in my poem late," she said "It will never happen again!"



A NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL NEXT ISSUE

When There's a Will



Nothing is more deadly than a father's hatred. Unless it's a son's revenge ...

by **MARTHA HOKE**

PAPA WAS WAITING for me behind his desk. There was a check under one hand and, as usual, a black-bordered document under the other. I took hope that my latest appeal had reached a receptive mind. However, there was something

about the gleam in his eye that made me doubtful. I decided silence might be the best approach.

He laced his fingers together, still covering the check. "Let me see. You called me last night to ask for a check to outfit a Little League

team you are sponsoring? I think the amount was a hundred dollars?"

I nodded, watching him. So far, so good. He continued. "To be on the safe side I checked with the Little League this morning and, indeed, I find you are actually sponsoring a team, as you insisted. However, you seem to be misinformed as to the amount needed. It comes to eighty-eight dollars and fifty cents."

He smiled grimly while I cursed myself. I had to get greedy for a few bucks. He pushed the check across the desk. It was for exactly eighty-eight dollars and fifty cents. "It is a little late for penance, Orville." I might have known I could hardly avoid the lecture.

"My son," papa said, not at all tenderly. "I have been constantly disappointed in you. Even if your marriage to the upstairs maid, whatever her name was, was not successful, I have finally lost faith in your ability to live up to the name of Grimm."

Here it came! "That charming picture of you in the newspaper, emerging from the public fountain in your under shorts two weeks ago has finally done it." He gave me a stern look. "On that morning I made out my final will and testament. I might add, it is written while I am of sound mind, so don't play with the idea of contesting it."

I thought the bit about my marriage was a low blow. I was sixteen at the time and easily impression-

able. It was certainly well in the past. But, unfortunately, the front page picture of me was an excellent likeness. He pushed the will toward me. I had known it was a will. Who wouldn't, with all that black-border around it? It would have to be a holographic will.

They always were, carefully written on that black-bordered paper of which he seemed to have an ample supply. It couldn't be too bad, I thought. Until now he had always made reasonable provisions for the only heir he had in the world. So I sprawled in the chair across from papa and read his latest creation.

I read the date and place. "New Orleans, Louisiana, April 1, 1968," and progressed to the meat of the affair. "I, being of sound mind, do bequeath my entire fortune to the study of the occult in the interest of psychic phenomena."

My mouth dropped open. It would have made me laugh except MY fortune was involved. And the old man was on his last legs. It did make him laugh in that peculiar cackle that had grated on my nerves for all of my thirty-seven years. I went on reading. It was short, with only two more statements before his name.

"This study is to be made by Doctor Ernest Blanton, and the disposition of my entire fortune lies entirely in his hands." The last sentence was doubly underlined. "I hereby disinherit my only son, Or-

ville Grimm III, who has disgraced the name of Grimm the last time."

This hit me between the eyes. I came out of my chair and yelled, "What the hell?" before I could control myself.

Papa turned absolutely white. Gasping for breath, he reached into the drawer beside him. I was there before him and stuck his nitroglycerin pill under his tongue. There was no use considering the will. He was sly enough to have a duplicate one in the wall safe. I knew it wouldn't take much to send him heavenward, but now was hardly the time. I popped another pill under his tongue and watched him come back to life.

Finally he looked up at me and chuckled mirthlessly. "You will notice the will is written in my own handwriting, which is acceptable in this state. It is written and signed by me!" He let out another cackle. "You cannot force me to make any changes in it, Orville!"

He shouldn't have used the word 'force'. Who had forced who into preparatory school, pre-law school, and law school, for which I had no liking? I had come to hate the sight and sound of the word 'force' until it had become an obsession with me. Maybe that's why I chuckle law school. Actually that is why Papa took exception to me. He might have anyway. Our personalities had always clashed.

I made myself walk back to my chair. I picked up the check, folded

it, and put it in my wallet. So he had forced me to accept a lousy check for eighty-eight bucks and fifty cents! Inside I was seething. But I was beginning to have a few ideas of my own. I looked across at papa.

"Thank you very much for the check."

I turned to pour myself a glass of inferior sherry from the bar next to the desk. Drinking it, my mind was working overtime. Now I wondered what had happened to all the other holographic Wills he had tucked in the safe.

He scraped open a drawer. It was as if he were reading my mind. "Don't get any notion these former wills are worth anything at all," he said. He pulled out half a dozen wills from the drawer and tore them across and across again.

"Maybe you would like to meet Doctor Blanton, Orville? He has made a thorough study of the occult." He said this without a smile and then added: "Doctor Blanton is coming here this evening for a week's visit with me." Papa pulled at his left earlobe, which in him was a sign of being overly elated.

Psychic phenomena! I thought I'd better get a look at Doctor Blanton. So the old man was disappointed in me because I had no high-powered profession. Isn't that dandy? He'd made his fortune foreclosing on simple souls all over the state of Louisiana. He'd wanted me to be a lawyer or a doctor. How was that

from a guy who was a fifth grade dropout?

I managed a smile. "Thank you very much, Papa, for your check. Indeed, I should like to meet Doctor Blanton."

This shook the old man for a moment. Then he resumed his know-it-all attitude. "Doctor Blanton will be here at four o'clock. You may stay for supper," he allowed grudgingly.

Supper. That's a laugh. Papa wasn't going to give out with the steaks. I had heard him say a couple of million times, "I am a frugal man," but that wasn't what I'd call it.

For twenty-five years he had employed a crotchety old dame who tidied up the house in the morning and provided dinner for him at noon. Then she went on her way. Supper was whatever she had left over and, when I couldn't duck out, I was the unpaid employee who grabbed the surprise package, whatever it was, from the ice box.

Papa stood and leaned cautiously on his cane. "I am going out to my workshop. I trust you can find something to do before Doctor Blanton arrives." He gave me a sly smile. "I do hope your team wins, Orville. That's the last check you'll ever have from me." Now I knew I had to have a look at the doctor. I wondered how he was for murder.

I let Doctor Blanton in. "I am Orville Grimm III." I smiled at him and took his hat.

He twitched his scraggly mustache in surprise, his eyes darting about the entry hall. Putting his rather seedy overnight bag beside the door, he firmed his chin and said determinedly, "I have an appointment with your father about the—"

His voice trailed off. So he knew about the will!

I gave him an old New Orleans bow and announced, "I will call him for you, sir. I only hope Papa doesn't change his will again soon, for your sake."

I called Papa on the intercom and ushered Doctor Blanton into the parlor.

Curiosity got the better of me. I looked at Doctor Blanton seated gingerly on the edge of his chair with his legs tight together. "What on earth brought you to doing research on the occult?"

He strove for dignity. "Mr. Grimm. I was with—I mean, I observed gypsy fortune tellers who seemed to actually have contact with those who have departed this life—at a carnival years ago. It has long been a dream of mine to study this phenomena." For the first time Doctor Blanton's eyes met mine sincerely. "I believe contact can be made with those who have gone to a better world. On this basis I wrote to your father concerning this project."

Papa chose this moment to make his appearance. I was beginning to think Doctor Blanton had something going for him. Papa went for sin-

cerity in a big way. But Papa's multiple millions could scarcely be ignored. The old man wasn't going to have the last laugh on me. And the last laugh didn't seem far off.

Doctor Blanton had been born and reared in Camden, New Jersey, I soon found out. After a serious monologue on the subject of dealing with the dead and hinting at his new approach—and all this at the supper table, Papa retired to his room. I sat and stared at Doctor Blanton.

He was looking greedily around the room.

I said pleasantly, "Is this house going to be your research laboratory, Doctor?"

He blinked at me, coming back from some rosy haze. "Yes, it is, Mr. Grimm."

And then I threw it at him again. "I do hope Papa won't change his mind—about the will, that is. You may as well know he has made a new will every two weeks in the past five years." I repeated it. "He has made a new will every two weeks in the past five years!"

Doctor Blanton looked startled. "He has?" he mumbled. Then he let the cat out of the well-known bag. "He doesn't seem to be in very good health, Mr. Grimm?" And the question mark was three feet high.

I shook my head soberly. "No, he isn't. If it weren't for his pills he wouldn't be here now." I leaned forward and said confidentially, "Actually, I am very well off. Money



is of no consequence to me. More than anything I want papa to have his heart's desire. Even with the pills I am sure he won't last more than five years. I am certain your research can wait that long if he doesn't change his will."

I had the right guy. Doctor Blanton's greed was showing. "Your father has invited me to spend a week here. I am sure I can keep him interested in my work."

I rose. "Maybe papa told you I do not reside here. We have our differences, but now I am most concerned with his health. If no one else is here be sure to have papa's pills handy. Without them papa would die."

And this was no lie. It was soaking into the doctor's brain. I showed him the box of pills in the desk drawer and explained there were more on the table beside papa's bed. Papa's attack that morning was a clue. He had a hard time getting to those pills himself.

Maybe Doctor Blanton did give him the pills. Maybe he didn't. But three days later Doctor Blanton called me to say that papa was dead. I gave it a long hard look. There was no possible way I could prove malice.

After the macabre business of laying papa away, I gave Doctor Blanton plenty of time to leave the cemetery before I returned to papa's house. I walked quietly into the study and propped myself against the wall.

Obviously Doctor Blanton had the combination to the safe. He was twirling the knob. He was so absorbed a fife and drum corps could have marched through the room in full blast without his noticing. He opened the safe.

I cleared my throat. His startled jump made me laugh inside. Recovering himself, he pulled the holographic will from the safe and began reading it aloud in lugubrious tones.

I knew it all by heart, even to the last sentence: "I hereby disinherit my only son, Orville Grimm III, who has disgraced the name of Grimm for the last time."

Doctor Blanton sat down regally in papa's chair behind the desk. He

was having a hard time looking unhappy. He said, "Rest assured, Mr. Grimm, your father's wishes shall be observed according to his last will and testament." He put the will on the desk and folded his arms. His eyes were piously raised toward the ceiling.

I had to break up this touching scene and I did.

"Doctor," I said for openers, pointing at the will. "That will is completely invalid!"

Doctor Blanton sat up straight and his mouth dropped open. Nothing came out. I took the chair across from him. "Are you aware of the Napoleonic Laws of the State of Louisiana?" I had the floor.

"I, Orville Grimm III, as the only living heir, will inherit papa's entire fortune. I know he could have disinherited me years ago when I married at sixteen without his consent. He did not. Had it ever occurred to you that his entertaining me at supper the night you arrived after he had disinherited me in just so many words might have invalidated the will? Just such a social contact in this state obviously invalidates such a will."

Doctor Blanton drew a deep breath. He almost smiled. "My goodness, Mr. Grimm. I have no recollection of your supping with us the night I arrived." He shook his head sorrowfully. "I am extremely sorry for you, but I cannot see how you could possibly contest the will on this basis."

So we were going to play this one to the hilt. I had a little surprise for Doctor Blanton. I sighed and said patiently, "Being eccentric and having little schooling, papa never consulted a lawyer except to find out that a holographic will is acceptable in this state. But, Louisiana is the only State in the Union with the doctrine of 'Forced Heirship'. This is one of the few things I learned in law school. You see, there is one more factor here. It occurred to me when papa first showed me the will."

Doctor Blanton shouted, "You have no leg to stand on, Mr. Grimm. He did disinherit you in exactly those words. I shall certainly take this to court!"

"No, you won't," I replied evenly.

"Allow me to quote: 'A parent who disinherits a child must also refrain from any business relationship that might be construed as a reconciliation.' I remind you that forced heirship is a unique feature of Louisiana's Napoleonic Civil Code."

I drew papa's check from my wallet. "I have here a check made out to me and signed by papa the day you arrived. I am sorry to deter your study of the occult in the interest of psychic phenomena, Doctor Blanton. However, this check was dated two weeks after the holographic will was written and signed by papa."

I smiled across the desk at the good doctor. "Let us say that eighty-eight dollars and fifty cents puts you out and me in the driver's seat!"

COMING SOON:

PICNIC AT MIDNIGHT by EDWARD D. HOCH

THE ALMOST PERFECT HIDING PLACE by BILL PRONZINI

THE UNLEASHED by NORMAN DANIELS

DEAD MAN'S PASSAGE by EDWARD Y. BREESE

THE MATCHES by JOHN JAKES

DEAD MAN'S SONG

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It was a hymn of vengeance, written by a dead man's widow, played by he who had put him in his grave. Or—was it?



NICK VELVET had rested too long among the spring flowers and budding trees and lengthening days. When the winter winds blew he was content to spend his days with Gloria in the little upstate city. But when the weather began to warm and the

children could be heard at their games, he knew it was time to be back on the job.

On that May morning he might have accepted an assignment to steal a battleship from the navy, but in reality the woman who sought

him out in the city's only park had something more unusual in mind. On sunny days during the spring Nick Velvet could often be found in Green Park, a place with more than a passing resemblance to the London park of the same name.

Now, before the mowers had been at work, the grass was tall and very green, rippling like a wooded pond with each slight stirring of the wind. He sat and watched it and smoked a cigarette, waiting for someone like the woman in the sunglasses and the green slouch hat.

"You're Nick Velvet?"

Nick stared up at her, taking in the hat and the sunglasses and the neatly tailored suit. From what little he could see of her face, he guessed her to be middle-aged and vaguely handsome.

"Yes. You're the woman who wrote me?"

"Carol Olander." She seemed about to sit on the grass at Nick's side, but then thought better of it. "You steal things?"

"Some things. For some people. If I accept the assignment, my price is twenty thousand dollars."

"The money is not important. But your discretion is. Some distance from here, in a midwestern city, there lives a famous surgeon. His name is Dr. Kenneth Elkin. Perhaps you've heard the name."

"I don't believe so," Nick answered.

"He came into the news last year during all the heart transplant news.

He's been experimenting for ten years with liver and kidney transplants in humans, and has even done some work with monkey brains."

"What do you want stolen? I usually charge for for animals."

"No animals," Carol Olander said, leaning a bit further to whisper it. "I want you to steal an—organ."

"You mean a heart or a kidney or something like that?"

"No, no! An organ. One that Dr. Elkin plays at a church near his home."

Nick Velvet thought about it. He'd never been hired to steal an organ before. "Why is it so vital to you?"

"On next Saturday afternoon, a recording firm is to tape a concert by Dr. Elkin at the church. For highly personal reasons, it is necessary that the recording session be cancelled. I can do this in only two days—by removing either Dr. Elkin or the organ. I do not lean toward murder. The organ must be stolen."

"Or destroyed."

"What?"

"Or destroyed," Nick repeated. "That would serve the same end."

But Carol Olander shook her head. "I have nothing against the congregation of the church. The organ should not be destroyed, nor should the church be damaged unnecessarily in its removal."

"That's a tough order. Organs are big things."

"I admit it. You'll earn your money, Mr. Velvet."

"For my own curiosity—why is it so important? To you, to Dr. Elkin, to the recording company?"

"I am not free to speak of my motives. And for twenty thousand dollars, you should not ask. As for the rest, Dr. Elkin has long played the organ as something of an avocation. He has played in concert on the church organ before, as it is considered one of the finest instruments in our state. The cost of it was well over one hundred thousand dollars."

"That doesn't interest me too much," Nick Velvet told her. "There's a limited market these days for hot organs."

"I want the organ removed only for the period of the concert, you understand. Once the concert has been cancelled and the recording people have left town, the organ can turn up somewhere."

"Won't they just come back?"

"Not right away. These things have to be scheduled months in advance."

"Dr. Elkin could be kidnapped for the day."

"No! There is to be absolutely no harm done to Dr. Elkin! Understand that!"

Nick Velvet shrugged. "You're paying the bills. One organ, cash on delivery."

The city of Parkhurst was as familiar to Nick Velvet as his own home town, even though he'd never set foot in it before. The country-

side around it was lonesome with wheat fields only now being sown, and the roads into the city were as flat as the land that surrounded them.

There was not a great deal to see in the city itself, and that was as it should be. A railroad depot, a post office, a scattering of stores and a hotel—that was the midsection of Parkhurst.

Further out, where the people lived, were the churches and schools and the city's sole hospital. Nick would drive out there later in his rented car, but first he stopped at the Parkhurst Trust Company, an elderly structure with peeling gold lettering on its front windows, to cash a check. He remembered a bank very much like it in the town where he'd been brought up, a financial institution that had somehow survived both the depression and the midwest robber gangs of the Thirties.

Nick Velvet had liked that town he grew up in, even more than the teeming streets of New York's Greenwich Village where he'd been born. His father, an Italian shopkeeper, had died in a gangster cross-fire during a prohibition battle in the final months before repeal, and Nick had gone west to live with an aunt. He was a high school dropout who'd gone to war at seventeen, and dreamed some nights of the career he now followed.

Yes, he knew cities like Parkhurst, and he knew that a surgeon of Dr. Elkin's renown would have

an account in the Parkhurst Trust Company.

"Just checking credit," he told the manager, a short balding man who would have believed anything. "Here's my card. I'm interested in a Dr. Kenneth Elkin."

The banker smiled. "There's no credit risk here. Dr. Elkin is one of our leading citizens. He maintains a balance in five figures at all times."

"I had no real fear," Nick said. "I understand he's something of a musician."

"You must mean the organ playing. Yes, he plays almost every Sunday afternoon at the church. He's quite good."

Nick nodded and started to leave. Then, almost as an afterthought, he asked, "I'm checking credit on a woman, too. Name of Carol Olander. Does she have an account here?"

The banker shook his head. "Bad risk. The only Carol Olander I know of in this town is one whose husband died last month. Left a lot of unpaid bills and not much money."

THE CHURCH WAS on a residential side street, not quite in the suburbs but close enough. Parkhurst's population was less than 20,000 by the last census, and it was a community of home owners and church goers. The church many of them went to was Christ Episcopal, a tall Gothic structure built in some long-ago hope of a city of 100,000. It was a church

that needed a mighty organ, and it had one.

Nick Velvet heard the sounds of it as he approached, and paused to listen on the low steps leading up to the great front doors. It was obviously a practice session, and the organist hesitated once or twice, repeating an uncertain passage.

"Are you a music lover?" a voice behind Nick asked, and he turned to face a tall young man in clerical garb. "I'm Reverend Mawson, the rector here."

"Nick Velvet. I was just passing through town and I thought I'd take a look at your church."

The rector seemed pleased. He smiled and ran a slim hand over his thinning blond hair. It was the organ, of course, which attracted you. It's the finest instrument in this part of the state. Would you like to see it?"

"I certainly would," Nick said.

Reverend Mawson led the way to the big oak doors.

"Are you a salesman?" he asked.

"Credit investigations," Nick Velvet replied. "They take me all over this part of the state, but I've never passed through Parkhurst before." They were inside now, and Nick stood back in genuine awe before the massive casework and gleaming display pipes which filled the rear of the church. I'm overwhelmed"

The minister smiled, obviously pleased. "I enjoy showing it off. There are ninety-seven pipes in all, and it has quite a tone to it. Come



up to the choir loft and I'll show you the console."

The man at the organ had stopped playing as they approached, and now he stood up. The rector introduced him as a Mr. Curtiss, the choir master. Together they pointed out the various parts of the organ console to Nick, the thumb pistons and toe pistons, the stop-knobs and swell pedals.

Nick Velvet listened and looked, and asked appropriate questions. "What would you ever do if you wanted to move it to another location?"

Reverend Mawson chuckled. "It took us a month to install it. Removing it would probably take al-

most as long. No, it's here to stay, probably for as long as the church stands." His voice turned wistful. "I only wish we had more people to hear it."

"I was down at the bank," Nick said, "and they mentioned some doctor who plays every Sunday afternoon."

"That would be Doctor Elkin, a well-known surgeon. Actually, he hasn't been around in the past few weeks, but he'll be recording an album of organ music here on Saturday. It's a great honor for our church."

"He's a professional, then?"

Not really. The recording company is a small one that specializes in this sort of thing. I think the main market for the album will be in this area, although there are a number of organ buffs around the country. Doctor Elkin is an absolute wizard on this instrument." He took in Mr. Curtiss' bleak expression and added, "as is our own choir master, of course."

They chatted for a few more minutes and then Nick took his leave, thanking the rector and pausing to stare skyward at the twin towers of Christ Episcopal. The organ music had started again, faltering and a bit uncertain. Like the music, he was feeling just a bit uncertain himself.

The woman named Carol Olander phoned his hotel room that night. "I'm glad you've arrived, Mr. Vel-

vet. Have you planned your theft as yet?"

Nick exhaled a cloud of cigarette smoke before he answered. "The thing is impossible, I'm afraid."

"That's why I *hired* you! That's why I'm paying you twenty thousand! You deal in unusual thefts, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then—"

I said it was impossible. I didn't say I couldn't do it," Nick told her. "Don't phone me again. Just have your money ready."

Velvet hung up and made a few notes on the pad before him. Tomorrow morning he would have to visit the local library. Until then—He had a sudden thought and reached for the phone book, flipping the pages until he reached the O's. There was only one Olander listed. He dialed the number and waited through five rings, then heard a woman's voice on the other end. "Hello?"

"I'd like to speak with Mr. Olander, please."

"This is Mrs. Carol Olander. My husband, John, died last month."

"I'm very sorry to hear that," Nick said. "I hate to intrude upon you at this time. I'm Gordon Drake and I'm checking on something for Christ Episcopal Church. It's about their organ. Are you familiar with it?"

"No."

"Did your husband have any interest at all in organ music?"

"None whatsoever. My husband was an insurance salesman."

"Could I ask you how he died?"

"It's no secret," she said. "He died on the operating table of a massive hemorrhage during a fairly routine operation for ulcers. I am seriously considering filing a malpractice suit against the hospital and surgeon involved."

"The surgeon was—?"

"Dr. Kenneth Elkin. He killed my husband."

Nick Velvet hung up the telephone and sat for a long time staring out the window. The motive was clear enough now. He'd been hired by a woman who wanted revenge on the doctor who caused her husband's death. The only trouble was, the voice on the telephone wasn't the voice of the Carol Olander who'd hired him.

The library yielded a number of musty volumes on the construction and operation of organs. Nick pondered the diagrams and made more notes, and wondered about the time required to dismantle the great organ of Christ Episcopal. The day was Tuesday. Four days before the recording session. Time. But time for what?

He drove out to the best section of town, and found the stately colonial house where Dr. Kenneth Elkin resided. It was about five miles from the hospital, on a street where few children played. But the house seemed strangely quiet, the grass in

the front yard seemed just a bit too tall.

Nick Velvet strolled over to a sprawling ranch two doors away, where a sandy-haired neighbor was belatedly raking the winter's accumulation of dead leaves and soggy newspapers from his bushes. "Dr. Elkin?"

The man looked up. "No. He lives a couple of houses down. The colonial there. But you won't find him home. Been away about a month now."

"Oh?" Nick put on a puzzled expression. "I was wondering. I'm a friend of his from the Club, and I haven't seen him around lately."

The sandy-haired man dropped his voice a notch. "I thought everybody'd heard by now. The doc had some bad luck. One of his patients died on the operating table, and the widow's raising a stink. I hear she's planning a malpractice suit and has even sent him a couple of threatening letters. I guess he and the wife just wanted to get away for a while. They're probably up at the cottage. Should be back too, though. There's some big deal coming up Saturday, a recording of him playing the organ down at church."

Nick Velvet nodded and thanked the man. He went back to his car and drove slowly away.

On Thursday night, just after eleven, Nick was picking the lock on the side door of Christ Episcopal Church. It took him only a moment, and then he was inside the great

darkened structure, moving up the center aisle like a departing bridegroom. He used a tiny pocket torch to find his way to the choir loft, and once there he let his hands wander ramdomly across the cold firmness of the organ console he had been hired to steal.

He never heard the soft breathing behind him until it was too late. Then suddenly the beam of a heavy flashlight was blinding him, and a voice was demanding, "What are you doing here?"

It was the voice of Mr. Curtiss, the choir master, and Nick felt his heart sink. He'd fallen into a trap that even the greenest thief should have been able to avoid.

ON SATURDAY MORNING the Reverend Mawson opened his church early. The truck from the recording company had already arrived, and there was much preliminary work to be done. Microphones were strung from predetermined locations, stereo tape recorders were made ready, and technicians checked their dials and gauges. It was all very businesslike, and that pleased Reverend Mawson. He glanced over to the sidelines where his choir director, Curtiss, stood, and checked his watch. They would be starting soon. He hoped Dr. Elkin arrived on time.

"Pretty well set," the producer called from the choir loft.

Reverend Mawson nodded. He saw the street door open and hurried forward to greet Dr. Elkin,

shaking his hand. "I was afraid you'd be late, Doctor. We're all ready."

Dr. Kenneth Elkin, tall, impressively white-haired, glanced upward, adjusting his eyes to the church's dimness.

"Fine, fine," he said. "I haven't had time to practice lately. Hope I'm not too rusty."

Reverend Mawson followed him up the narrow staircase and watched while he seated himself at the great console, not even removing his street garments. The valves and pistons were positioned, and the recording producer walked over to stand at his side. "Run through something first, Doctor, so we can check the sound level."

Dr. Elkin nodded and touched a tentative finger on the keyboard. Nothing happened.

He tried again, his face a puzzled mask. Still nothing. Then Curtiss moved in from the sidelines to replace him on the bench. But still the organ remained silent. The technicians grouped around, and the producer scratched his head. Reverend Mawson asked, "What's the matter? What's happened to my organ?"

It took them several moments of searching before they found the trouble, before they uncovered the work of the thief. Then at last the producer turned grim-faced to Dr. Elkin and Reverend Mawson. "It's quite fantastic, really, but it seems that someone has stolen the sound from your organ."

On Sunday afternoon Mrs. Olan-

der phoned Nick Velvet at his hotel. "You did a pretty good job, Mr. Velvet, even if you didn't remove the entire organ. How did you manage it?"

He sat back in the chair and gazed at the ceiling. "I had a bit of luck."

"Now I can understand your reputation in such matters."

He cradled the telephone under his chin and lit a cigarette. "You owe me some money, Mrs. Olander."

"You'll get it. I was just curious as to how you brought the thing off."

"I removed the relay machines which link the console with the wind chest and the pipes themselves. They're an electromagnetic device which operate a valve to let in atmosphere or build up pressure-wind in the key channels. Without the relay machines, the air in the organ pipes just sits there, not making a sound."

"You learned a lot about organs."

"I said I was lucky. I went to the church on Thursday night with something like that in mind, but I couldn't have brought it off so successfully without inside help."

"Help from whom?" the woman asked, suddenly apprehensive.

"Curtiss, the choir master. He caught me there, in the church, but he was more than willing to lend a hand, and even offered some suggestions. Turns out he was quite bitter about Dr. Elkins' appropriation of his organ in the first place."

"What about the parts you removed?"

"Curtiss has them. He'll see that they turn up." Nick exhaled a blue cloud of cigarette smoke. "How about the money now? Will you come here with it?"

"That's too dangerous," she said.

"It's dangerous just talking on the telephone."

"Not in this town. The police never heard of wiretaps here, and they're illegal anyway."

"Where will we meet, then?"

She seemed to think a moment. "There's a frozen custard stand on the road out of town, just south of the bridge. Drive in there and I'll join you."

He hung up and quickly packed his bag. It wasn't likely that he'd be coming back after he picked up his money. Then he drove out to the place she'd indicated, a little white stand with large tinted glass windows and a giant custard cone on its roof. He bought a chocolate custard and sat in the car licking it, waiting her arrival.

Presently another car pulled in alongside his, and a young woman in black slipped out. She opened his car door and joined him without hesitation.

"You're Mr. Velvet?" she asked.

"Certainly am! Pleased to meet you, Miss—"

"Mrs. Olander. I was told if I met you here you'd be able to tell me something about my husband's death during the operation."

Nick Velvet's heart skipped a beat. He glanced into the rear view



mirror and saw the two police cruisers converging on their rendezvous. He sighed and took a final bite of his cone. "I'm very much afraid, Mrs. Olander, that the both of us have been played for suckers."

THE DETECTIVE WAS big and hairy, and he talked like New York City. He sat at his desk peering at Nick Velvet and asked him again, "Do you still deny that Mrs. Olander hired you to wreck that organ?"

"I do," Nick said. "First of all, the organ wasn't wrecked, and secondly, I never saw Mrs. Olander in my life before she got into my car this afternoon."

"Now that's a hard one to believe."

"It happens to be the truth."

The detective, whose name was

Masset, sighed and picked up a teletype message. "They know you back east, Velvet. You're bad news there."

"That's back east. I was just passing through."

"We received a tip that Mrs. Olander would be meeting you at the custard stand to pay you off for the organ job. You were there, and that's good enough for us."

"If she was paying me off, where was the money?"

Masset looked uncomfortable. "We'll turn it up."

Nick Velvet was feeling a little more confident. "You can't hold either of us for ten minutes, and you know it. You have nothing linking me to the organ."

"We have Reverend Mawson, and he's on his way down here to identify you right now."

It was Nick's turn to feel a bit uncomfortable, but he kept the expression of outraged innocence on his face. "And just why is this woman supposed to have hired me?"

"Her husband died last month during an operation that Dr. Elkin performed. She's threatened to sue him and the hospital, and sent threatening letters to the doctor. She's even called Mrs. Elkin on the telephone and threatened her. This was just one more way of getting her revenge on Elkin. I suppose we can be glad it wasn't anything more violent."

"Does she admit to all this?" Nick asked.

"She admits to the pending lawsuit, of course, but not to the threats or phone calls. Naturally she wouldn't, since that would harm her malpractice suit."

"Just what I was thinking myself," Nick said.

The intercom buzzed and Detective Masset flicked it on. "Yes?"

"The Reverend is here," someone announced in a flat voice.

"Bring him in." He turned to Nick Velvet. "Now we'll see if you change your tune."

The door opened and the minister entered with another detective. He stared at Nick Velvet and then at Masset.

"Reverend Mawson? I'm Masset, pleased to meet you. I want you to tell me if this is the man who visited your church and looked at the organ early in the week."

"Don't I even get a line-up?" Nick mumbled.

"Shut up, wise guy. What about it, Reverend? Is he the one?"

The minister didn't hesitate. "Yes, certainly. There's no mistaking him. But —"

"That'll sound good in court," the detective said with a smirk.

"Perhaps you'd better let him finish," Nick Velvet said.

"Finish?"

"Well, yes," Reverend Mawson continued. "I just wanted to say that the organ is all back together today. It happened sometime during the night. Curtiss played it at serv-

ices this morning and it sounded fine."

An half hour later, Nick Velvet parked his car down the street, in front of the house of the sandy-haired neighbor, and went the rest of the way on foot. He knew of course that they would be home now, returned from the cottage for yesterday's abortive recording date.

The woman answered his ring, and stared at him through the latched screen door. "Yes?"

"Mrs. Elkin?"

"That's right."

Velvet smiled slightly. "I wasn't certain. You look different without the sunglasses and hat."

"I'm afraid you're making a mistake."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Elkin, You're the one who made the mistakes, when you thought you could get away with not paying my twenty thousand dollars. Is your husband at home?"

"Not right now."

"Then perhaps I should come in. It's so awkward standing out here."

Reluctantly she unlatched the screen door. "You'll have to be brief. I'm on my way to meet him at the church. He's down there looking over the organ."

"I know. I was at police headquarters when the word came in that the missing parts had been restored. Of course I wasn't surprised. I knew Curtiss would want to play it at morning services."

"How much will you take?" she asked, abandoning the pretext.

"I believe twenty thousand was the amount agreed upon."

"That's ridiculous."

"It would have been ridiculous for Mrs. Olander. As soon as I talked to the town banker I knew she didn't have the money to hire me. That's why I got suspicious after your first phone call, and phoned the real Mrs. Olander. Your voices are nothing alike, really."

"But you went through with it anyway?"

"It seemed safe enough: I didn't realize at the time that you'd trick the real Mrs. Olander with a fake phone call into meeting me at the custard stand, and then tip off the police to arrest us both. Of course with the organ playable again, the minister wasn't interested in pressing charges, so they had to release us. Maybe he suspected his choir master's part in the plot."

"You know a lot."

"I know you faked the letters to yourself and lied about the threatening phone calls from Mrs. Olander. That, along with framing her on this organ business, was all part of your plot to build up a picture of a deranged woman intent on avenging her husband's death at Dr. Elkin's hand. You wanted to discredit the malpractice suit, to discredit Mrs. Olander."

She'd retreated into the living room, but they still stood facing each other, sparring for position. "You think I could have gotten away with that?"

"Probably. There was only my word that Mrs. Olander didn't hire me, and the word of a thief isn't too good in court. Against that would be the fact we were arrested together, and the fact of her motive. Stealing an organ to avenge a dead husband is a bit far-fetched, but that very fact would contribute to the picture of an unbalanced widow."

"How'd you know it was me who hired you?" she wanted to know.

"Simple. I know Mrs. Olander was innocent, and since she denied the letters and phone calls to you also, I was inclined to believe her there, too. But if she was telling the truth, then you had to be the liar, Mrs. Elkin."

"All right," she said at last. "I'll give you ten thousand. After all, you didn't really steal the organ."

"You'll give me twenty thousand, Mrs. Elkin. Full payment. Because, you see, there's one question I haven't asked you yet."

"One question? There's no other question you could ask. Certainly not one worth twenty thousand dollars."

Nick Velvet twisted his lips into a smile. "How's this one? Did your husband know what you were doing, Mrs. Elkin?"

"What difference does that make?"

"Because if he didn't know, Mrs. Elkin, the pattern may not yet be complete. Grief-maddened widow files malpractice suit, writes threatening letters, makes threatening phone calls, hires thief to steal organ needed for doctor's concert. And next? Can't you see the headline, Mrs. Elkin? Can't you see it? Something like: *Doctor Slain; Grief-maddened Widow Questioned.*"

She'd gone all white with his words, and now she clung to the back of a chair for support. "I — you're wrong. You —"

"Just a word of advice, Mrs. Elkin. Don't try it. You're not smart enough to get away with it. If you don't like the guy, divorce him and live off the alimony."

In the morning Nick Velvet left Parkhurst with the twenty thousand safely in his pocket.



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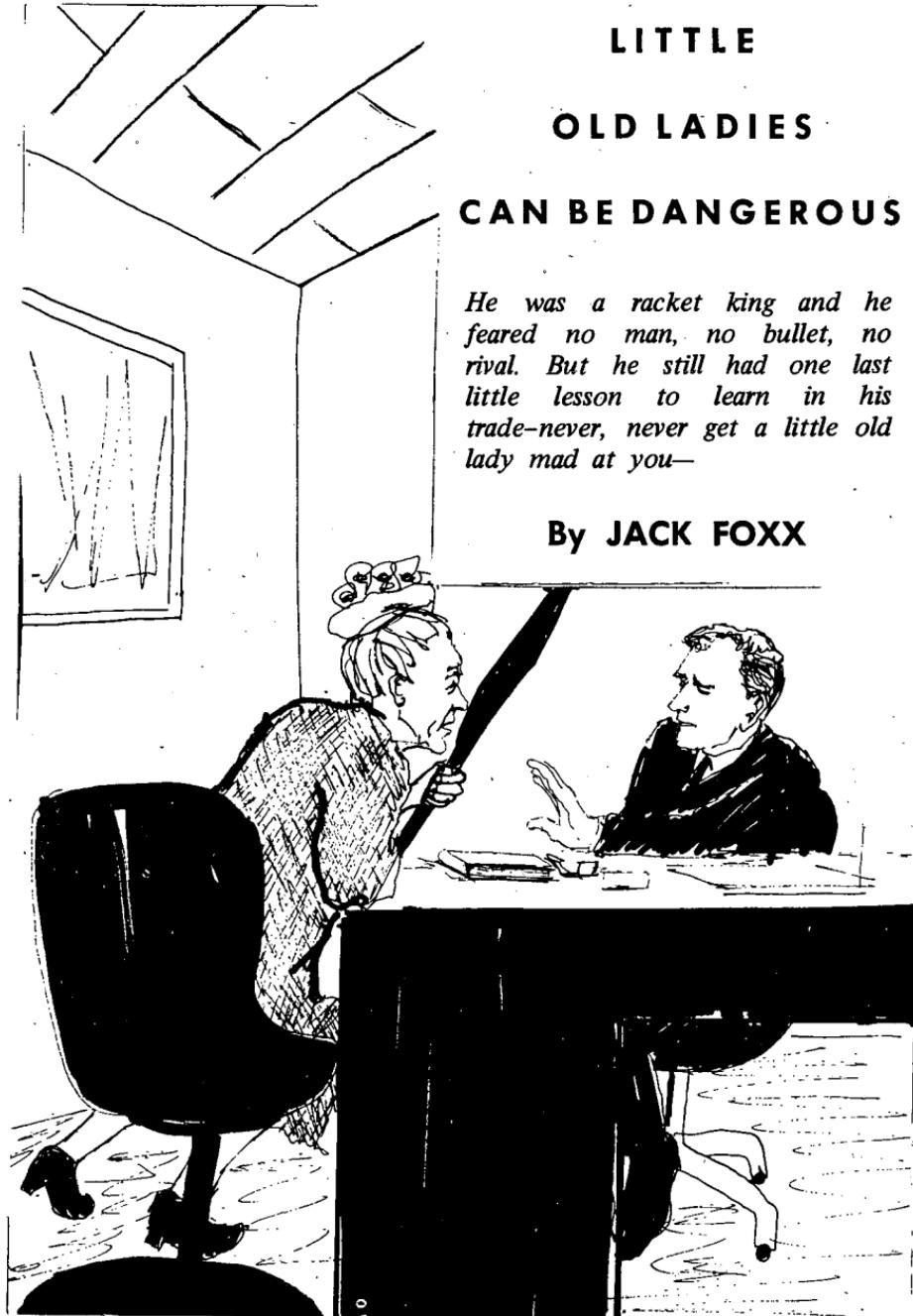
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September, 1969



LITTLE
OLD LADIES
CAN BE DANGEROUS

He was a racket king and he feared no man, no bullet, no rival. But he still had one last little lesson to learn in his trade—never, never get a little old lady mad at you—

By JACK FOXX



I WAS SITTING at my desk in one of the Security cubicles, drinking a glass of milk and reading the morning papers, when the direct inter-com from Dandy Jack Sample's office began buzzing loudly and impatiently.

I put down the sports section and depressed the switch. "Yes, sir?"

"Morgan! Get up here! Right now!"

"What is it, Mr. Sample?"

"Don't ask questions. Just get up here!"

When he used that tone of voice, you didn't waste any time. I ran out into the hallway, bypassing the elevator, and took the stairs three at a time. Dandy Jack's office was on the floor above, the top floor of the *Melody Club*, a small but very posh casino he owned on the Las Vegas Strip.

I pushed open the door to the outer office, ran past his amply-proportioned blonde secretary, who was standing by the open door to his private office and wearing a startled expression, and then came to an abrupt halt. My eyes went wide at what I saw.

Dandy Jack was sitting in his expensive naugahyde swivel chair, off to one side of the huge walnut desk that took up at least one third of the office. His head was thrown back, his hands gripping the chair arms, and his face

was approximately the color of the milk I had left in the Security cubicle. His scalp shone with beaded perspiration.

"Morgan!" he yelled. "Morgan!"

The little old lady in the long, lace-bodiced dress and gray knitted shawl who stood over him was brandishing one of those old-fashioned, wood-handled umbrellas. She had the tip of the thing stuck under Dandy Jack's nose, and there was a fierce look in her eye.

I said, a bit lamely, "What's going on, Mr. Sample?"

"Get her out of here!" Dandy Jack bellowed. "She's nutty as a seacoast loon!"

I jumped forward, then, and took the umbrella away from the little old lady. Gently. She gave me a scathing look. "Who are you, young man?"

"Tony Morgan," I answered immediately. "I'm Chief of—"

"Never mind the introductions!" Dandy Jack yelled. "Just get her out of here, Morgan!"

"I think you'd better come along with me, ma'am," I said, taking the little old lady gently but firmly by the arm.

She slapped my wrist. "I won't budge until Mr. Sample returns Christopher's and my money."

"Money?"

"One hundred thousand dollars," she said.

I looked at Dandy Jack. He was mopping his forehead with a monogrammed silk handkerchief.

"You won't get a single penny out of me," he said to her.

"You stole our money."

"I didn't steal anything."

"Yes, you did."

"Look, lady—"

"You lured my poor departed Christopher into this den of iniquity, this house of sin," she told him righteously. "You tempted him with promises of evil gain, and then you fleeced him of our life savings. Oh, you wicked, wicked man!"

"I never even seen your husband—"

"Murderer!" the little old lady muttered. "Follower of the Primrose Path!"

"Lady, how many times do I got to tell you—"

She fixed him with a steely glare. "Repent, sinner, before it is too late. Poor Christopher cannot rest in his grave until you cleanse the wickedness from your soul and return what is rightfully mine."

"Lady—"

"If you do not," she added ominously, "the wrath of the avenging sword will strike you down."

"Listen, what is that supposed to mean?"

"Christopher was an accomplished marksman with firearms," the little old lady said, even more

ominously. "He taught me the ways of the gun for protection many years ago, against the evil gangsters spawned during the noble Volstead Act. Oh, yes, Mr. Sample, I am an expert, too, with a pistol."

Dandy Jack grew even whiter, if that were possible. He pointed a trembling finger. "Are you threatening me, lady?"

"Are you going to return my money?"

"No!"

"Then you will rue the consequences. I warn you."

Dandy Jack looked at me. "Morgan, what are you waiting around for? Get her out of here!"

Hastily, I led the little old lady out. When I returned several minutes later, Dandy Jack was drinking a triple brandy. Some of the color had returned to his cheeks. He said, "What did you do with her?"

"Took her down to the main entrance," I answered.

"You should have taken her to a psycho ward."

"What was it all about, Mr. Sample?" I asked. "I couldn't make any sense out of it."

"You think I could? She came charging in here like Carry Nation and stuck that damned umbrella under my nose. I couldn't make heads or tails of what she was ranting at first, but then I get the gist. What happened, her and

her old man saved up this hundred grand to buy a retirement ranch or something. Took them forty years, like.

"So two weeks ago they draw the money out of the bank and the old boy comes here to Vegas to close the deal. But he gets side-tracked somehow and never goes to the real estate agent he's supposed to see. Instead, the old girl says he comes here."

"The *Melody Club*?"

"The *Melody Club*, Dandy Jack said. "And he blows the whole hundred thou on the private dice tables. In two hours. You know how it is when some of them get the fever,"

"Sure," I said. "Once they get started, they can't quit."

"Happens all the time. But this old doll, she don't see it that way. She claims I run a crooked game and all that other hoopla you heard, and that I stole the hundred grand."

"Your tables are as honest as they come," I put in.

"She won't have none of that. But you ain't heard the clincher yet, Morgan."

"Clincher?"

"That's right. When the old man loses the money, he calls the old doll and tells her what he done. He tells her he can't face her, and he can't bear the burden on his conscience. You know what he does then? He drives out to the Hoover Dam and pulls a

Brodie off the observation deck. That's why she calls me a murderer. Can you feature that?"

"It's kind of tragic, you know?" I said. "I mean, him losing their life savings and then—"

Dandy Jack looked at me coldly. He was his old self again, and the look meant for me to shut up. I shut up.

He said, "This is a tough business we're in, Morgan. You got to have ice water in your veins when you're in this business. Now you, you're a good security man. But your problem is, you're a lousy sentimentalist. The gambling racket ain't no place for sentiment."

"Yes sir," I said.

He nodded. "So anyway, I says to the old lady, I am sorry your old man pulled a Brodie off the Hoover Dam, and I am sorry he lost the hundred grand in my club. But that's the way it goes. Everything at the *Melody Club* is on the up and up. I got a small operation here, I tell her, no syndicate ties or nothing. I can't afford to chisel or the big boys want a piece of the action. It's strictly house percentage at the *Melody Club*. You know that, Morgan."

I knew that he was skimming thousands of dollars a week off the top of the profits before the Internal Revenue Service came around. But I said, "Yes, sir."

"But the old girl just won't listen to none of it," he went on.



"I tell you, Morgan, she's nuttier than a tree full of squirrels. She starts poking at me with that umbrella, and that's when I call for you. You heard the rest of it."

"I heard it, yes, sir."

He chewed at his lower lip for a moment. "What do you think, Morgan?" he asked finally. "You think she's serious about the avenging sword and the expert marksman and all that?"

I shook my head confidently. "I wouldn't worry, Mr. Sample," I told him. "You get these crackpots now and then, the kind of business you're in and all."

"Yeah, I guess you're right."

"Sure."

The following afternoon, I returned to the security section after making my regular rounds of

the club. I was just sitting down at my desk when Dandy Jack buzzed for me. I went up to his office.

He was pacing his beige mohair carpet like a caged panther at feeding time. As soon as I came in, he went to his cherrywood desk and picked up an envelope lying there.

"So I shouldn't worry, huh?" he said. "This come in the mail this morning."

I looked at the envelope. It was purple, and smelled of African violets. It had been postmarked Las Vegas. I took out the single sheet of paper from inside. It was purple, like the envelope. The writing said: *An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.* That was all, except for a signature: *Agatha Treadworthy.*

"Nice handwriting," I commented.

Dandy Jack's nose became very red. "Never mind the handwriting, Morgan."

"The letters are firmly-shaped," I said musingly. "I've been taking this correspondence course in how to analyze handwriting. Now this type here—"

He glared icicles at me. "Shut up about your lousy correspondence course and listen. I no sooner get that opened up and read when Lu Anne buzzes and tells me I got a call. I answer, and who do you think?" He didn't wait for me to reply.

"Yeah," he shouted. "Listen, I says when I know it's her, what's the idea of writing me crank letters and calling me on the phone? Have you decided to return my money? she says. No, I says and I hang up on her."

"Well," I said carefully, "I don't know what you're getting so worked up about, Mr. Sample. I mean, crank letters and phone calls can't hurt you."

"Yeah," he said stiffly. "But guns can."

I assured him soothingly that everything would be all right. He allowed finally as how he guessed I was probably correct. I went back to work.

On Friday, two days later, he summoned me once again to his office. He looked like a man with a very bad liver condition. There were heavy, dark-shadowed pockets under his eyes, and the left side of his mouth seemed to be twitching with a nervous tic. "This come in yesterday's mail Morgan."

The envelope he handed me was yellow this time, and carried the fragrance of roses. The paper inside read: *Judgment Day is coming. Agatha Treadworthy.*

Dandy Jack said, "She called me up again yesterday. That stupid Lu Anne put the call through, even after I told her to check with me first when any dames call. I don't know why I keep her around."

I knew why he kept her around, all right. But I said, "What did she say?"

He shrugged. "As soon as I know it's her, I hang up fast."

I made a little polite coughing sound. "Like I said, Mr. Sample," I told him in an appeasing tone, "you shouldn't let these things get to you. This Agatha Treadworthy is just a little old lady, after all. Nuts, maybe, but harmless."

"Yeah," he said. "Like a rattle-snake is harmless."

"I don't follow."

"She took a shot at me last night."

"What?"

"A shot!" he yelled. "With a gun. Boom, boom?"

I moistened my lips. "Where?"

"At my place. About nine o'clock. I was just coming home from the club here. I get out of my car to open the garage and whang! this slug bounces off the front fender. Misses me by inches. I hit the ground and crawl under the car. I figure I've had it. But nothing else happens. When I come out, after about twenty minutes, there's nobody around. It scared the hell out of me, Morgan."

"Maybe it was just some kids fooling around with air rifles," I said. "You know how kids are when they—"

"Do kids have large calibre automatics?"

I tugged at my ear.

"It was her, all right," Dandy Jack said. "I know, because this come today, not ten minutes ago."

He produced a third envelope, beige this time; I caught a whiff of sandalwood. The note said: *Heed my warning. Return my money, or the lightening bolt of my vengeance will surely strike you dead. Agatha Treadworthy.*

Very slowly, I refolded the paper and put it back in the envelope. Dandy Jack was staring at a spot past my right ear. When he spoke, his voice was a whisper. "I'm scared, Morgan, I don't mind telling you. Nothing like this ever happened to me before, and I don't know how to handle it."

Softly, I said, "What are you going to do?"

"It ain't what I'm going to do," he said, and some of the old meaningful glisten came back into his eyes. "It's what you're going to do."

"Me?"

"You're going to find her, Morgan. Do you understand that? You're going to find that crazy old doll before she puts a bullet in me."

"Yes sir," I said. "I'll find her."

"You'd better," he added pointedly.

I went down to my Security cubicle. From my private phone, I called Benny the Eagle.

"Tony Morgan," I said when he came on. "How's the eyes, Benny?"

"Like an eagle," he said. "What's up, Tony?"

"I need a face to go with a name."

"What's the name?"

"Agatha Treadworthy."

"How was that?"

I repeated it.

"Agatha?" Benny said. "That's a funny name for a guy."

"It's not a guy."

"Oh, a doll."

"Sort of," I said. "It's a little old lady."

"A little old—what did you say?"

"A little old lady."

"You putting me on, Tony?"

"I'm not putting you on."

"You're looking for a little old lady?"

"That's right."

"What for?"

"Private."

"Okay. What does she look like?"

I described her.

"I been around a long time," Benny said. "This is a new one."

"Do what you can, will you, Benny?"

"Agatha Treadworthy, huh?"

"Agatha Treadworthy."

"Okay, Tony. If you say so."

I made a couple of other calls, relaying the same information. There was really nothing I could do then but wait.

Monday came. I called Benny the Eagle again, and the others. Then I reported to Dandy Jack.

"Well?" he asked.

"Nothing," I told him. "Not a whisper."

"Damn it," he said. "I don't like this. I don't like it at all. I hired a couple of bodyguards for protection, but this waiting is driving *me* nuts. I think I'm getting an ulcer."

"You ought to see a doctor," I offered.

"So I'm seeing one," Dandy Jack said. "He gives me some white gunk that tastes like chalk and tells me to try to relax. Some relax, waiting for a slug to come flying out of the dark."

"We'll find her, Mr. Sample," I said. "It's just that these things take time."

"So do funeral arrangements," he said morosely.

I got home at ten o'clock that night. The phone was ringing it-self off the hook.

"Where have you been?" Dandy Jack shouted when I answered. His voice sounded three octaves higher than usual.

"I went to a movie," I said. "What is it, Mr. Sample?"

"Oh, nothing," he said in a chill tone. "She just tried to kill me again tonight, that's all."

"The little old lady?"

"No," he said with shaky sarcasm. "Mary Poppins. She flew

down the chimney with a machine gun."

I coughed. "What happened?"

"I was sitting in my den, going over the books. All of a sudden there is this crash behind me. One of the glass doors leading to the patio shatters. I dive under the desk. The two clowns I hired for bodyguards come rushing in, but it's too late by then. They don't find anything. The old lady is gone."

"Are you all right?" I asked him.

"Fine, just fine," he said. "I got bruises on both knees, a lump on my head, and a desk with a bullet hole in it. But other than this, I'm just great. Why haven't you found her, Morgan?"

"I'm trying the best I can, Mr. Sample," I said. "There's just not much to go on."

"Never mind the excuses," Dandy Jack said. "I want you over here. On the double."

"I'm on my way," I said.

He was lying on the couch in his den when I got there, an ice pack on his forehead.

"It's about time," he said.

"My cab got tied up in a traffic jam downtown."

He sat up, holding the ice pack to his head with one hand. He didn't look very well, but that was understandable.

He picked up an envelope from the end table and handed it to

me. "This come by messenger, right after I called you."

I opened it. Back to African violets again. I read: *Repent. Cleanse the evil from your soul. The chariot draws nigh. Agatha Treadworthy.*

"She's a psycho case," Dandy Jack moaned.

I took a deep breath. "Maybe you ought to do it, Mr. Sample."

"Do what?"

"Repent," I said slowly.

"Repent?" He scowled ferociously. "What are you talking?"

"Maybe you ought to give her the hundred thousand," I said. "I mean, that would put an end to all this."

"Oh, sure," Dandy Jack said. "And then every clown who ever loses a nickel in my club has a wide open door to try the same thing. They could bleed my bones."

"Nobody would have to know."

He was silent for a moment. "We could keep it quiet," he said finally.

"Does any one else know about the old lady besides us?"

"You think I would tell anybody?"

"Not even the bodyguards?"

"They don't know from nothing."

"It's not like a hundred thousand was going to break you, Mr. Sample," I said.

He thought about that.

"A hundred thou is pin money," he said. "Just nothin' but pin money."

"Sure, you make that in one night on the private tables."

"That's right. A hundred grand is nothing."

"Not," I said graphically, "when you got to make a choice between that and a bullet."

He shuddered. Then his eyes got crafty.

"Hold on," he said. "You've given me an idea, Morgan."

"I have?"

He rubbed his jaw. "Suppose," he said, "suppose I just agree to pay the hundred thou. You know, string the old dame along. Then, when she comes forward for the money—"

I frowned. "Hey," I said, "you're not thinking of taking her for a ride?"

He gave me a disgusted look. "Morgan, you don't go around taking nice little old ladies for a ride."

"Well", I said, "This ain't the Thirties, you know. These days, you got to use finesse. You got to be smart. What we do, when the old doll comes for the money, we make a citizen's arrest. Then we take her to the cops. Attempted extortion. Attempted murder. The cops lock her up or put her away in a bug-house or something. You see what I mean?"

I nodded.

"That's pretty smart," I said. "You've sure got brains, Mr. Sample."

He puffed up like an adder. "You ain't working for no dummy, Morgan."

"No, sir. What do you think she'll do next? Another phone call?"

"That's what I'm thinking. And when she calls, I will tell her I'm going to give her the hundred grand."

"And when she comes for it, that's when we nab her."

"That's just what we do, Morgan."

I was having a glass of milk at the *Melody Club* bar the following morning, when Ralph, the day bartender, told me Dandy Jack wanted me upstairs.

I went to his office. He was chewing on a two-dollar panatella and wearing a long frown.

"The old lady just called," he told me.

I waited.

"She wanted to know if I was going to return the money, just like always. I have seen the error of my ways, I tell her. I am repenting. I am going to return the money which is rightfully yours."

"Now we got her," I said, grinning.

"No, we ain't got her."

"But—"

"She wants it mailed."

"Mailed?"

He blew out smoke.

"She's a cute old bird," he said. "She don't want to come here for it, she says, because even if I am repenting, she don't trust my kind." He snorted.

"Mailed to where?" I asked.

"Phoenix."

"Phoenix?"

"What are you, a parrot? Yeah, Phoenix. You know?"

I cleared my throat.

"We got problems now," he said.

"What kind of problems?" I asked. "If she wants it mailed, that's all right. I'll just go down to her place in Phoenix and make the citizen's arrest there."

"It ain't that simple," Dandy Jack said. "She wants it mailed care of General Delivery."

I chewed a knuckle.

He looked at me. "Listen, Morgan, I don't want to lose any hundred grand. It may be chicken feed, but I can't go around throwing away a hundred grand to some crazy old doll. I'm a businessman. It ain't good business."

I agree that it wasn't good business.

"I got a plan, though."

"A plan?"

"Here is what you do. Take a flight down to Phoenix this morning. Check the telephone directory and the city directory and anything else you can get your hands

on. I'm thinking that Agatha Treadworthy is a phony name, but it don't hurt none to check."

"Right," I said. "Then what?"

"I make up a dummy package," he said. "Cut-up newspaper, you know? Then I mail that down there. What you do, you go down to the main post office in the morning and watch for the old lady to pick up the money. When she does that, you follow her and find out where she goes. Then you make the citizen's arrest."

I rubbed the back of my neck. "I don't think the dummy package is such a good idea, Mr. Sample."

"Why not?"

"Well," I said, "the cops might not be convinced the old lady was trying to put the bite on you if they opened up a dummy package and found cut-up newspaper. But they sure would have to believe it if there was real money in the package."

He did some ruminating. "Maybe you're right, Morgan."

"But the rest of the idea is perfect," I added quickly.

He gave me a curt nod to show that he approved of what I approved of. "Call me just as soon as you find out anything either way on the old doll's address."

I said that I would.

I flew down to Phoenix on the eleven-thirty flight. I called the

Melody Club from my hotel early that same evening, and Lu Anne put me through to Dandy Jack.

"There's no Agatha Treadworthy living in Phoenix," I told him. "I checked every place I could think of."

"Okay," he said. "She's a cute one, all right. If she wasn't nuts, I would put her on my payroll."

I agreed that she was a cute one.

Dandy Jack said, "I got a hundred grand together, and mailed it off care of General Delivery. You make sure you stay glued to the main post office tomorrow."

"Right."

"Call me just as soon as you get her to the cops."

"You bet I will," I promised.

But it was morning of the second day following before I called Dandy Jack again. I made the call from a pay phone inside the Phoenix police headquarters.

"Where the hell have you been?" he yelled. "Why haven't you called?"

"I've been in jail," I said softly.

"What? What did you say?"

I repeated it.

"Jail?" he said. "Jail?" There was a long silence. Then he laughed. "Oh, you mean with the old doll. For a minute there—"

"No," I said.

"No?" he said.

"No," I said. "I mean, in jail. Locked up in a cell."

"Locked up in a cell?"

"I got arrested," I said.

"Arrested?"

"Yes sir."

"What for?"

"Loitering."

"Loitering? Did you say loitering?"

"Loitering," I said. "In the main Phoenix post office."

There was a strangled sputtering from the other end of the wire.

I went on quickly, "You told me to watch for the old lady to pick up the package of money at the post office. There were so many old ladies going in and out of the place with packages, all of them looking alike to me, that I decided to watch from inside. I camped right next to the General Delivery window, so I could hear when somebody asked for the Agatha Treadworthy package. But the old lady never showed up. I was there about two hours when these two guys came up to me, flashed badges, and hauled me off to jail. It seems one of the clerks saw me standing there and got suspicious and called the cops.

"They asked me what I was doing there, but I knew you didn't want to get involved in it what with the papers and publicity and everything, so I just clammed up. They tossed me in a cell overnight. I had to pay fifty bucks to get out this morning."

"You idiot!" he screeched.



"What about the money? Did you check on the money?"

"I just called the post office," I said, "and asked if a package addressed to Agatha Treadworthy had been called for yet."

"What did they say?" in a very hushed voice.

I took a deep, shuddering breath. "They said it had been picked up last night."

I waited, holding the phone away from my ear, until he finished screaming. Then I said, embarrassed, "What do you want me to do now, Mr. Sample?"

Several words came over the wire.

"Yes, sir," I said, wincing.

"Now I have got to find some way to write off that hundred thou. And that gun-crazy old lady is still on the loose. All because

you get arrested for loitering in the damned Phoenix post office!"

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Sorry? Sorry?" He sputtered some more, and then regained his composure. "At least you had enough sense not to get my name involved. That's something. But if you ever breathe one single word of this to anybody, just one word, I'll have your ears. Do you understand that, Morgan?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Now get your tail on the first plane back to Vegas. And try not to get arrested for loitering at the airport!"

"The first plane," I answered. "Yes, sir."

Outside, I flagged a cab.

But I didn't go to the airport.

I was dividing the money on the dining room table when she came in from the kitchen.

She set the tray she was carrying down beside me. "We'll have some tea," she said.

"I don't like tea."

"Of course you do."

"No, I don't."

"One lump or two?"

"I like tea with sugar even less."

She put in two lumps and handed me the cup.

I sighed. She sat down across from me, sipping her tea. Then she began to shuffle through the bills I had put on the table.

"There is only fifty thousand here," she said sternly.

"Half for you and half for me," I said, not looking at her.

"We agreed that I was to get sixty thousand dollars," she said. "It was my idea, after all. I had to write all those silly letters and make those silly telephone calls. And I had to visit Mr. Sample's office in person." She smiled. "I seem to have a flair for acting. I was rather good, wasn't I?"

"Just fine," I said. "But you seem to forget that I took all the real chances. I fired those shots at Dandy Jack. I convinced him he ought to pay the money. And I had to let myself get arrested, of all thing, in case he decided to check my story. Do you realize that he blames me for the loss of the hundred thousand dollars? He could have me shot."

"Nonsense. You are being melodramatic."

"Possibly," I said. "But my part is still worth fifty thousand."

"Anthony, our agreement was for sixty-forty."

"And I say it should be fifty-fifty."

"Sixty-forty."

"Fifty-fifty."

We glared at each other.

"Oh, all right," I said finally. What was the use arguing?"

She smiled, fluffing her gray hair. "There's a good boy," she said. "Now drink your tea before it gets cold."

I sighed again.

"Yes, Aunt Sophie," I said.

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